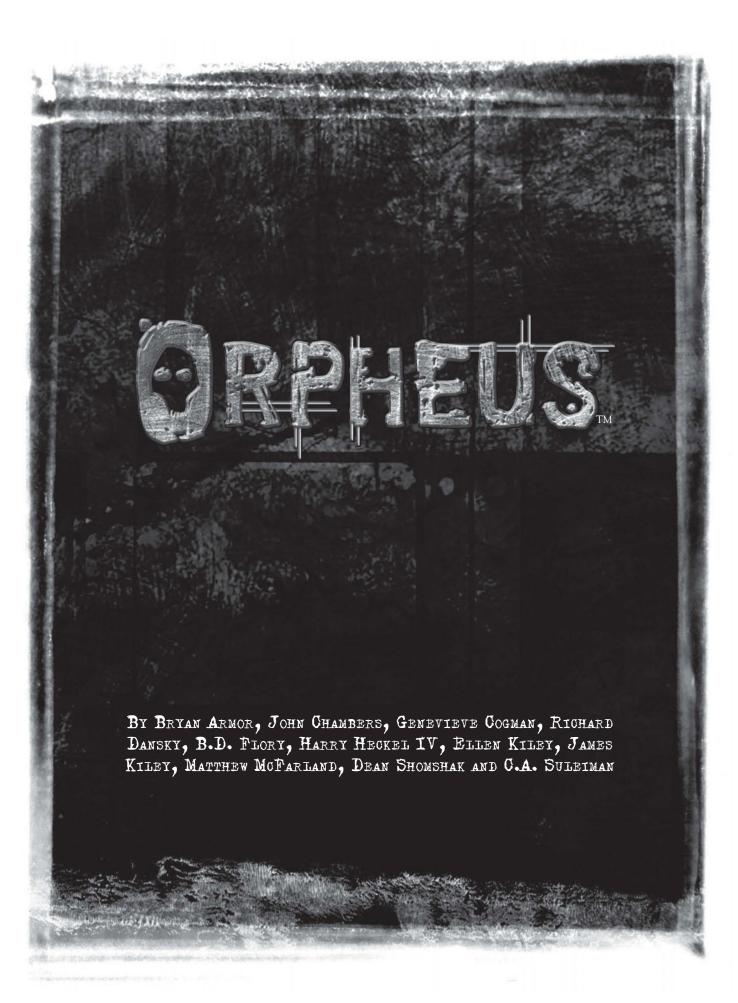




DON'T LOOK

BACK



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DEDICATION

My mother and father spent 27 years of their lives in a brutal and hostile desert, under an unforgiving and narrow-minded government, all so that my sister and I could enjoy a life they never had. How do I even begin to thank them for that? Where do I start?

Mom, Dad... my every word is my thanks, for the love and support you have provided me. None of these words would have meaning without you.

Lucien Soulban



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PROLOGUE: PROOF OF LIFE

BY RICHARD DANSKY

If you hear the words "It's easy money," you know you're about to get screwed. Remember that. I didn't, and look where it got me.

• • •

The job itself seemed harmless enough. The briefing folder Diaz handed me when I walked into the Situation Room was pleasantly thin, which meant I wasn't wasting a lot of time memorizing target tendencies and birthdays and crap like that. I'd done fourteen trips out already, and not once did I need to know the target's shoe size, pet's name or favorite music to screw to. The only pertinent data was where to find them and what I was supposed to do, but when I told Intel that, it fell on deaf ears. The first time, they lectured me on how Orpheus Group was "committed to providing a full service operation to its clientele," which I took to mean "we need to look busy so we can justify the insane fees we charge." Not that I mind the insane fees, of course; I enjoy making what is technically a metric assload of money every trip.

Naturally, Diaz knew how I felt about the briefings. We'd worked together four or five other times, and she never hid the fact that she thought I was taking the work too lightly. She saw me skim the folder — the name on it read "Friedlander" — and clucked at me like a mother hen. "You ought to read it, Tony," she said. "Just to make me feel good."

"Yeah, yeah." I dropped into one of the Situation Room chairs and rapidly flicked through the report's pages. "Is there anything special about this one, or is it a standard spook job."

"If you'd read the folder," she replied with ice in her tone, "you'd find out." Diaz had black eyes and black hair, and a chin sharp enough to cut cheese. It took me over a year to discover Diaz's first name was Rebecca, and six months after that to learn she was a retired skimmer. She didn't talk about why she'd given it up,

though. She didn't talk about anything but the job.

"Fine," I said, and tried reading what she'd given me. It looked straightforward enough: A suburban multimillionaire thought his pretty little trophy wife was screwing around on him and wanted the standard tail job with an option. In plain English, that meant he would pay me to follow the missus for a while to see if she was spreading her stock options around, and if so to scare the living crap out of her and her boyfriend. The client was kind enough to include a couple of pictures of his wife, and I whistled appreciatively. I could see why he thought she was engaged in her own little human resources project — she had green eyes, a heart-shaped face and the sort of body that looked like an anatomically correct Barbie doll; her hubby was 64, balding and built like Henry Kissinger.

"Nice." I handed the folder back to Diaz. "What's the timeframe?"

She tucked the folder under her arm and checked her data assistant. "You go under today. It's a week's work."

"Today?" I slid out of the chair and bounced to my feet, my sneakers squeaking on the tile floor. "That's not enough time. No way can I be ready today. Hell, I'm not rated to go under again for another week." I shook my head to emphasize the point. Going under too often or for too long was dangerous. It tended to shake all sorts of mental screws loose. I'd seen more than one peer hauled out of the Nursery in a white jacket with wraparound sleeves, and didn't want to run that sort of risk.

My sanity's fragile enough as is.

Diaz smiled sweetly at me and held the folder out again. "You didn't read the last page, did you?"

"Why?" I asked, suspicious, and took the briefing back. "What's on it?"

"The fee."

"Oh." I flipped to the back page. The fee was indeed there, and it was very, very substantial. I did some quick calculations and frowned. "He's paying for at least two months' worth of deep time. Are you sure this gig is only a week?"

"Positive." She nodded tightly. "Someone in sales is bucking for a bonus, I think. To be honest, the money's why I called you in for this one. For that much cash, I figured you'd be willing to do a rush job."

I could feel my resolve weakening. We

charge a lot at Orpheus for a single day's work — operatives who can perform out-of-body experiences on demand don't come cheap — let alone two months' worth. Even though a skimmer's cut isn't huge, relatively speaking, a moderate percentage of a ton of money is still a lot of money. Part of me was already planning how I'd spend it all. It was a long list.

"Does it have to be today?" I asked. "Give me 24 hours and I'll be good to go, but right now?"

Diaz shrugged. "The client said today. He's used to getting what he wants. If you can't go now, I call someone else in."

"Someone else?"

"I'm sure Hallen would be willing to go. He hasn't gone under in almost a month."

I snorted in disbelief. "You *know* what Hallen would do with an assignment like this."

"Yes," she countered, "but he'd be on it, at least." She leaned over the back of the chair opposite mine. "Look, Tony, I pulled a few strings to get you this gig. You're right, it's too soon after your last trip, but it's about as harmless as a projector run can be. If I thought it was dangerous, I wouldn't have called you. Not after last time."

"Not after last time, no." My eyes met hers. After a minute, she looked away. "You owe me, you know."

"That's why I got you this one," she said, dulling the edge on her voice. "I don't like carrying debts."

"And I like paying off mine." I skimmed the folder again, but kept coming back to the last page, and the very large number printed on it. There were a lot of zeroes there. Apparently, Mister Friedlander was very worried about what wifey was up to. Abruptly, I looked up. Rebecca was still staring intently at my shoes.

"If I take this," I said, "and that's purely hypothetical at this point, I want a couple of things."

"Like what?" She straightened up, and once again I realized I'd forgotten how damn tall she was. "Don't push me too far on this one, Tony," she warned.

"That's against regulations," she said.
"So's sending me back under so soon."

Igrinned. "Pushing's the only way to find out how far is too far," I said. "Three things. One, I want you to take a point out of my share."

"That's against regulations," she said.

"So's sending me

back under so soon."

"Good point."

I nodded. "If this really is easy money, you deserve something for steering it my way."

"I didn't do it because I like you," she warned.

"I know. Number two, I want three-month's beach when I get back. No point in making all this cash if I don't have time to spend it."

Diaz pursed her lips and leaned against the water cooler. Somehow, she'd reached the other side of the room without my realizing it. Something in her needed that separation. "That one's easy," she said. "What are you really holding out for!"

I took a deep breath. "I want everything Orpheus has on this "Bishop" guy. I want another crack at him."

"No."

"What do you mean, no?"

Her face was as expressionless as stone, as pale as old ice. "I mean no. You don't get that, Tony."

I stood up. "Dammit, Diaz, you know what happened last time. I want to be prepared if I run into him again."

"No you don't, Tony," she said. "You want another crack at him, and I can't let you do that."

I opened my mouth and realized no words were coming out.

"You're not ready," she continued. "You're a nice guy, and a good skimmer, and you've got the survival instincts of a cockroach on amphetamines, but no way are you good enough to go after Bishop and live to talk about it. And if I give you that file, you'll skim it and then you'll go after him, and then you'll die. I really don't want that on my conscience."

"I wasn't going after him," I said, but the lie sounded pathetic in my own ears. "I just want to be ready."

"You will never, ever be ready. Trust me on this one. There's a reason Bishop isn't on our books& there's a reason most agents don't know about him." Suddenly, I realized there were tears at the corners of her eyes. "Do the job, Tony," she said. "Take the money. But don't ask me for this. Please."

I stood there, heart pounding in my chest like earthquake aftershocks. I closed my eyes, but instead of comforting blackness, I could see his face, leering at me as I snapped back to the safety of my own body. Instead of the hum of the air conditioning, I could hear his voice. "Run," he'd said. "You can't run fast enough."

I shuddered and forced my eyes open. Diaz was right in front of me, her eyes wide, her body tense. I could smell the faint scent of her hair, hear her breathing.

"Drop it, Tony," she said with a whisper. "Just take the job."

"This time," I said, and turned my back on her. "I'll see you in the Nursery in a few hours."

"No," she replied, "you won't."

•••

There were two sections to the Nursery, one for the sleepers who had to work here and one for the skimmers who didn't, but who were careful not to jeopardize their bodies by projecting in the field. Skimmers like me could put ourselves under, which was both good and bad. We didn't need cryogenic chambers to keep our bodies from going stale while we were away, we required minimal prep time, and the support staff got cheap thrills giving us sponge baths while we were on the job. The flip side was that we couldn't stay under as long as sleepers, which meant we were fairly limited in the sorts of things we could do. That, and the fact that anything that happened to our spirit bodies — for

lack of a better term — echoed in our real ones. That meant if, somehow, someone managed to chop off a skimmer's arm while he was projecting, the kids back in the Nursery were going to need bandages, a mop and a bucket in a hurry. Sleepers didn't have to worry about that, either.

On the other hand, sleepers needed much help of the chemical variety to project from their bodies. They did their work in big tubes that the staff called cradles and everyone else called coffins. His eyes had been left open, and I knew, just knew, he was seeing something that real live people ought not to see.

Once a sleeper was out, she was out for a good long time. It took a while to put a sleeper under, and a while to wake her up, but in the meantime they could stay out of body for a of a month at a time minimum. I'd been on the sleeper side of the Nursery once, and it creeped the hell out of me. It was nothing but rows and rows of coffins, each of them trailing a dozen cables and wires leading to a central unit that dispensed whatever unholy crap they pumped into those things. Technicians sat at scanning stations around the edge of the room, watching the sleepers' biometric readings for signs of necrosis the way housewives watched soap operas. Nobody talked. All you heard was the pinging of the scanners, and the hum of the machinery.

That wasn't the worst part, though. Each coffin had a window, a faceplate so you could look in and see how the sleeper was doing in his pool of suspension fluid. I'd looked in on one. His eyes had been left open, and I knew, just knew, he was seeing something that real live people ought not to see.

A month or so with your eyes open, staring, unblinking. The thought still gives me nightmares.

Our side of the Nursery, however, was a lot nicer, at least in my opinion. It was all couches and low lighting, and you could hear people chatting as they went under or came up. One skimmer, Kris Yamaguchi, took a stuffed Big Bird doll with her every time she went under, so if you went into the Nursery while she was working, you'd see it tucked inside her arm. It made the whole place seem a lot more comforting somehow.

I took the elevator down to sub-basement level three, where the Nursery was located, and whistled along with the music that someone had decided to pipe in. It was some pseudo-Celtic crap, rife with harps and hey-nonnies, and I was quite certain that if any authentic Celts had heard it, they would have laughed their asses off. One of my handlers, a skinny black guy

named Leo Reynolds, once told me that psych had specifically chosen the music to help relax us before we went under. He looked very surprised when I laughed.

Security waved me through, and I found myself inside the Nursery. Instinctively, I looked around. Only a couple of other skimmers were working, and the place was nearly deserted. I waved to a couple of techs I vaguely recognized, then meandered over to my couch and shucked off my shoes.

This one will be easy, I told myself. Nothing to it. Watch the girl, watch her screw around, then do enough of the bad poltergeist shtick to scare her back to her wrinkled sack of a husband. Easy money.

I took a deep breath, hoisted myself onto the couch, and closed my eyes. Easy money. I repeated it like a mantra. Easy money. It was the rhythm of the words that mattered, not what they meant. Easy money. I could feel the strange tugging deep in my chest that

meant I was ready to slide out of my body. It had come quickly this time. Easy money. The thought buoyed my spirit, lifted me up and away.

I looked down and saw myself lying there, six feet tall and badly in need of a shave. I smiled. Easy money.

What we do at Orpheus is of dubious moral nature at best, highly illegal at worst and occasionally freaky enough for some employees to smash wide open their own cryogenically frozen heads& even though they're technically "suspended." Orpheus recruits people like me and the tradeoff is made brutally

clear: Take the money and keep your mouth shut. Sometimes you worked in house, sometimes you worked with a team called a crucible and operated outside the main corporate campus. The system worked for everyone, because those of us who survived got rich and no one would believe half the shit we did at the office, anyway. You can't really sidle up to a woman at a bar and say something like, "Hey, baby, I'm going on ice for three weeks so I can use my out-of-body experience techniques to drive the CFO of an accounting firm insane, but when I thaw out, I'd love to give you a call." It's not the sort of pickup line that gets you laid regularly.

That's what we were paid to do, though, and everyone who worked at Orpheus Group made their peace with it. I'd heard vaguely that Orpheus had some underhanded, shadow-op deals happening, but frankly, I didn't care. No matter where we came from, we were private sector now, and the contract assignments came rolling in like sweet spring rain. They came from companies who wanted competitors screwed or spied on, from rich women who wanted their husbands tailed, from government agencies who wanted things

done that the CIA wouldn't or couldn't touch, from anyone who had the scratch and weren't afraid to hire us. And then, once the terms were settled, someone would write a very handsome check to the Orpheus Group and some poor schmuck like me would go under long enough to do the deed.

All of which explained, in a rudimentary sort of way, why I was off to see if a very nice looking lady named Joanna Friedlander was screwing her gardener.

I looked down and saw myself lying there, six feet tall and badly in need of a shave.

I smiled.

Easy money.

Igot there one of the standard ways you get anywhere when you're out of body, which is to say I walked and hitched rides with folks who never even saw me. The scenery isn't very pleasant when you're under. Not being part of physical reality makes you more critical of it. That's one reason to focus on the job at hand — so you don't have to look at what's around you.

The Friedlander place was easy enough to find. Diaz had put a map with directions in the briefing folder, and I did pay attention to that part of it. The place was out on the main line,

some community with too many consonants in its name and too many gated houses in its tax base. I noticed as I approached that there were no sidewalks, which is a sure sign that the neighborhood's full of snobby bastards. Can't have the foot traffic depreciating the property values now, can we? I shook my head and moved on.

Friedlander had made his money in electronics in the late '80s — fax machines and copiers, mostly — and his house reflected the aesthetic sense of a man who felt thermal fax paper was a work of art. The building was a red brick monstrosity, three stories high and adorned with shockingly yellow shutters. It was wide, squatting at the head of the driveway like a fat cat waiting for a mouse to wander near. All the windows were closed, I could see, and all the shades turned down, unusual for a nice spring day like this one. The lawn was trimmed to putting green smoothness upon which nobody would ever walk. No one *lived* in this house. They just spent time there.

I started up the empty driveway, moving fast. My plan, more or less, was to slip inside, get a feel for the house's layout and, maybe, scout for some evidence that Mister Friedlander had overlooked. Then, I'd just

tuck myself into a walk-in closet and wait for Missus Friedlander to do something naughty.

As I said, it seemed like a plan.

The inside of the house was as grim as the outside. Someone had told Friedlander that rich people collect art, and he'd done it the way a fat kid collected baseball cards. Nice pieces rubbed elbows with utter crap, something I was pretty sure was an original Parrish hung two inches from a widescreen TV, and you could have played pinball off the sculptures scattered around the first floor. Everything was a riot of mismatched colors, styles and periods, all displayed to their worst advantage. I found myself wondering whether it was his taste or hers that resulted in this, then shuddered. It didn't matter. I had work to do.

The stairs were broad, but surprisingly not marble. Instead, they were hardwood, carpeted in a deeply hideous lavender shag. It went with the wall — pink with a floral border — but nothing else in this universe; the banister that ran alongside it was brass. A match would have done the place wonders, but I'd given up smoking when I started skimming, and anyway, it wasn't like I could have brought any along.

At the top of the stairs, I hesitated for a moment. The house was silent, preternaturally so. Not only did I not hear any human voices, but I didn't even hear any of the normal house sounds endemic to too-large piles of property. There was no whistling from the ducts, no creaking from the vents, no gurgle of the plumbing — not even the unmistakable jingle of a spoiled pet's tag hanging on its collar. The place was dead.

A quick scan of the upstairs hallway hinted strongly that the master bedroom was to the left, so that's where I headed. Personal offices and whatnots would come later. What I was after was the bathroom in the master bedroom suite. You find more incriminating evidence in the crapper than you do in the rest of the house put together. Dropped notes, used condoms, you name it; it all somehow ends up in the smallest room. If Joanna Friedlander was screwing around, that would be the best place for evidence.

Upstairs was a bit more tasteful than downstairs,

which is a lot like saying that a cobra's less venomous than a black mamba's. Once you pass a certain threshold, the degrees don't matter. Still, the pieces of sculpture were fewer here, and smaller, most resting on marble-topped tables. I looked at a few while walking past — mostly objets d'art from the South Pacific

Your first urge when you're out-of-body and you hear someone is to hide. It's natural, until you remember you're invisible and intangible.

and Western Africa, no doubt a little too funky for the chaos downstairs.

Double doors marked the entrance to the master bedroom. They were painted white and had brass handles, and some genius had installed a peephole in the right door so he could see who was standing outside his boudoir.

"Jesus," I mumbled, and stopped, listening for any sounds emanating from within.

There was nothing. Mentally, I recited to myself the good bits of George C. Scott's big speech in *Patton* and walked through the door.

Sad to admit it, but I wasn't surprised by what I saw. Waterbed? Check. Leopard-skin print sheets? Check. Mirror on the ceiling? Check. The place looked like the honeymoon suite from a hotel in the Poconos, the sort that advertised heart-shaped hot tubs. The bed was unmade, of course, the sheets wadded up in a ball at the foot of the monstrous bed. The door to the bathroom was on the left, and it had been tastefully closed. Mirrors were everywhere; so were free-standing chrome lamps. Clothes lay strewn across the floor in a reasonably straight line, evidence of someone shucking their skivvies before climbing into bed. It was women's clothing on the floor, tasteful and expensive. Most of it was black. I thought back to the pictures of Joanna Friedlander I'd seen in the dossier and decided that black would definitely suit her.

Closer inspection of the laundry pile gave me one of those little "aha" moments that private eyes and inventors live for. Mixed in with the pile of lacy unmentionables was a man's Speedo that someone had forgotten to remove. Nothing in Friedlander's profile indicated she was a cross-dresser, so I figured this was the smoking gun I needed. Easy money indeed; the evidence was right there on the floor, first thing.

I knelt down and looked at the telltale clothing. It was a men's medium. Mr. Friedlander, if I remembered correctly, could barely get his leg into a men's medium these days. Clearly, someone else had been racking up the dirty laundry around these parts. Chuckling, I drifted into the bathroom to look for more evidence.

As I did, I heard thumping on the stairs. Obviously, someone was home, but I hadn't heard a car pull up outside the house or any door slam shut. That made me nervous.

Your first urge when you're out-of-body and you hear someone is to hide. It's natural, until you remember you're invisible and intangible, and that the lady of the house could walk through you nine times while you're whistling the 1812 Overture and she still wouldn't notice you. That being said, in a job like this, your

first reaction is still, "Crap, where can I hide?" There's something in human nature that doesn't want to get caught, ever, under any circumstances, and skimmers and sleepers are no different. The second that front door opens, most of us dive for the closets.

Of course, I was an experienced skimmer. I knew that no regular Joe was ever likely to see me& that I was perfectly safe. I knew that even if, somehow, the intruder saw me, there still wasn't much he could do to me. I'd even been exorcised once, not that it had mattered.

But the sound of those footsteps coming up the stairs creeped me out. I scooted out of the bathroom and dove into the walk-in closet on what seemed to be her side of the bedroom. It was a very full closet, crammed with dresses, business suits, blouses and a few things on hangers you wouldn't suspect would go there; I moved into the back. I could see a little through the slats in the closet door, and that was enough. If I was lucky, it was Missus Friedlander's boyfriend, come back in an attempt to figure out why he was chafing. (You've got to be a little bit of a voyeur to last in this job, or you go insane. It sounds sick but it's God's honest truth.)

out.

The footsteps stopped at the top of the stairs for a moment, then came closer. I hugged the closet's back wall and wondered what the hell made footsteps that loud on shag carpet.

The doors to the bedroom creaked open. A young man, maybe 25, stomped into the room. He had dirty blonde hair and blue eyes, and looked like he mainlined creatine powder on a regular basis. Someone had dressed him nicely in tan business casual, but the effort was wasted. His hands were at his sides, and one mother of a big diamond earring hung on his left ear. I couldn't see what was in his right hand, because his fist was clenched tight, but his left hand was empty, and he was in the room looking for something.

I exhaled with relief, or did the out-of-body equivalent. No doubt this turkey had snuck in the back and let himself in with a key that Missus Friedlander had given him; he'd been smart enough to be quiet while doing so. Once inside, he didn't have to worry about being silent. I edged closer to the closet door and watched him.

He moved quickly through the room, scanning the floor with rapid nods back and forth. After a few minutes,

he located the telltale underwear. With a swift motion, he stuffed it into his pocket, and I let out a mental sigh knowing that pretty boy out there wasn't going to be rummaging through the closet. I had all the proof I needed that Missus Friedlander was screwing around, though without physical evidence to back it up if Mister Friedlander had worries about that sort of thing, he'd set them aside when he hired Orpheus. We're not exactly big on due process, in case you were wondering.

Instead of leaving, though, the himbo stopped and looked

around. Then, carefully, he moved over to Mr. Friedlander's dresser and dropped something from his clenched right hand on it. It rattled twice on the dresser's wood top, then settled to a rest. Himbo looked at it, giggled and did his best to sneak out.

Just before leaving, he stopped and stood in front of the double doors and, so help me God, I thought for an instant he was staring at me. He smiled, then turned and walked out.

On the way out, he slammed the double doors. I found myself sincerely hoping he took up a life of crime so some guys I knew on the force would have something to laugh about. Footsteps clattered down the stairs, and then, faintly, I could hear a door open and close. I counted to a hundred, just in case the clever boy discovered he'd done something stupid again like leaving his wallet behind, then slid out through the closet door. After a moment's hesitation, I walked over to the dresser to see what he'd put there. It was no easy task.

The entire top of the dresser was covered in crumpled receipts, loose change, unpaired socks and less identifiable bits. It took me a moment to figure out what belonged there, and what didn't. It was a chess piece; a simple, cheap bit of black plastic that no one had bothered trimming the flash from. It lay there, facing the wall, and my blood ran cold.

It was a bishop.

I turned, but not fast enough. Something caught me across the chin and sent me flying. I spun around

Just before leaving,

he stopped and stood

in front of the double

doors and, so help me

God, I thought for an

instant he was staring

at me. He smiled, then

turned and walked



and tried coming to my feet, just in time to catch a kick to the underside of my chin. My head snapped back and I staggered forward a step or two, which gave my attacker enough time to plant a vicious combination in my gut.

The newcomer was tall, taller than I was, and his head was shaved. He wore what looked like prison blues with the sleeves pulled off and the fringes slightly blackened by fire; his arms were swirling masses of tattoos. He had pale skin and paler eyes, and a scar on his left cheek that twisted his mouth up into a permanent sneer.

"Surprised, prag?" he said, and took another swing before I could answer. I ducked out of the way, barely, and threw myself into a roll that took me past him. He swung again, wildly this time, but I didn't take the opening. I wasn't sure I could beat this guy and I didn't know if he'd brought along friends, so running seemed like the brightest of the batch of really dim ideas I had. I lurched to my feet and started running for the doors....

I didn't make it.

With a shout of "You ain't going nowhere," the con leaped and caught me. The two of us tumbled to the floor in a tangle of limbs, each throwing weak punches at the other. I swung a lucky elbow that caught him on the jaw, which threw his head back. Taking advantage

of the momentary opportunity, I twisted and threw all my weight to the left.

We rolled. His eyes widened when he realized what I was doing, but then we were through the bedroom wall and falling.

We crashed onto the grass. "What d'you want with me?" I said, but he recovered first, wrenching free of my grip and landing a solid cross to my cheek.

"Bishop wants you, Rubinelli," he said, and threw another punch. I put my arms up to block it, which proved to be a mistake; my assailant tore himself free. He bounced to his feet while I climbed to mine, then threw a flurry of punches I barely countered.

"Why the hell does Bishop want me?" I asked, and I tried to sneak a leg sweep past his guard. No dice; he simply took a step back and then tattooed my gut with a series of kicks.

"He wants you bad, man. That's good enough for me." A cold chill went down my spine. I'd run into Bishop on my last time out, and I had barely survived. Near as I could tell, he was a projector like me, most likely a sleeper, and he was one evil son of a bitch. I'd heard of him before, of course. Everyone does, after all, but not in name. He's the bogeyman of projectors, the one guy they always warn you about in vague terms and dire threats.

And somehow, last mission, I'd pissed him off. Now he wanted me dead.

I feinted a kick at the guy's crotch. You don't actually have dangling testicles when you're projecting, but the reflex to protect the family jewels is still there, and my playmate obediently covered up. I thanked him by delivering an open-fist punch to his throat and then another to his solar plexus. He gasped in pain, then smiled at me.

 $It wasn't pretty. \ I stared back, my hands balled into fists.$

"Tell Bishop to leave me the hell alone. I want no part of him, okay? Just let me do my job and I'll never cross paths with him again."

"Too late," the con said, and his hands suddenly melted away. The fleshy stumps at the ends of his arms shimmered for a moment before resolving themselves into wickedly sharp blades, like the world's cheesiest CGI effect. His grin widened, and I noticed that most of his teeth were rotten, misaligned fangs. He took an experimental swipe with one of his blades, and I swear I could hear the air whistle.

"I cut you here, you get hurt in the real world," he said, leering and stepping forward. "Ain't no doctor that can put a bandage on your soul once I slice it."

"You're right," I said, and ran.

He didn't catch me. Maybe the stunt with his hands took more out of him than I thought, or maybe he just let me go. I didn't know, and I didn't care. I just ran. I ran until I couldn't hear anyone behind me any more, until that nasty itching between my shoulder blades stopped, until my hands finally stopped shaking. Then I sat down and did my best impression of a deep breathing exercise until I could put together a complete sentence in my head without screaming.

Eventually, my feet took me back to the Nursery. It took a long time, though. Every alley I walked past was a potential ambush, and every corner seemed to have Bishop and his entire army waiting to pounce.

I saw no one, of course. No thugs accosted me, which was probably for the best. Once the reaction to the fight wore off, I'd found myself in serious pain. My playmate — the bastard hadn't even given me a name — had done a number on my jaw, and I hurt a dozen other places as well. I imagined that deep in the Nursery, someone was applying cold compresses to the nasty bruises that suddenly appeared on my theoretically sedentary bag of bones. At least, that's what I hoped was happening. I wasn't looking forward to waking back up in my body — my real one — and dealing with the pain all over again.

The whole thing stank, of course. It was clearly an ambush. Bishop's boy knew I was going to be there all along. Bishop staged the whole thing for my benefit,

and now, with the sort of genius that hindsight generally provides, I realized it had been a setup all along. The extra money? Diaz's contrite little speech? Honey to bait the trap. I'd played, and played beautifully, but I had to confess, she didn't exactly have to work too hard at it.

And the worst thing was, I'd even given her part of my cut. Furious at myself, I trudged back to where my body lay and thought about the questions I was going to ask Miss Diaz the next time I saw her.

• • •

"Where the hell is Diaz?"

I tried sitting up and made it halfway before a wave of nausea swept over me.

"Lay down, Mr. Rubinelli. Everything's going to be all right." The doctor's voice was calm and soothing, and exactly what I didn't want to hear just then. I also didn't want orderlies holding me down, people buzzing around me concerned, or my body feeling like an elephant had just stepped on me.

What I wanted was to hear Rebecca Diaz's voice, so I could get up off this goddamned couch and shake a few answers out of her. But she wasn't there. Angry, I tried again. "I need to talk to Diaz," I said, shoving the helpful hands away.

"Mr. Rubinelli!" The doctor sounded shocked. He was a short, heavyset man with a red face and a unibrow, and he was clearly used to having people listen to whatever he said. "You are badly hurt. I must insist you lay down and rest, or I'll have you sedated and you won't have any choice in the matter." Behind him, one of his assistants brandished a hypodermic of something that I assumed was suitably soporific.

I slid off the couch and my feet slapped against the floor. A jolt of pain ran up my left side, but I ignored it. "Listen, Tubby—"

"My name is Dr. Lucas."

"Okay, Dr. Tubby. You have two choices: You can tell me where Rebecca Diaz is, at which point I will be a good boy and lay back down like you asked me to, or your assistant can stick his needle in my ass after I run you over trying to get out of here. Which is it going to be?"

His mouth formed a sort of lopsided "O." I looked left and right, and saw people shaking their heads. "What?" I asked. "What?"

"That's right, you don't know." Dr. Lucas' face was sad now, and gentle. I was in no mood for it.

"Of course I don't know, I was out of my freaking body for the last ten hours. Now would someone please be so kind as to tell me what the hell is going on?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Rubinelli. Miss Diaz is dead."

I stood there, mouth open, unable to understand what he'd just said. "When," I managed to croak out. "How?"

The doctor's voice was soothing, reassuring. "They found her in her apartment this evening, on her bathroom floor." A grim smile tugged at the corner of his mouth. "Heart attack. Neighbors heard her calling for help; the police had to break down the door."

I blinked at him, wordless.

"Now, Mr. Rubinelli, please, get back up on the couch." I shook my head. "Take me to her."

He sighed. "Won't do you any good. Her family's already claimed her body. It'll be a private service for the funeral. Her father insisted."

"Damn it, this isn't right!" Something about the whole thing nagged at me, but I couldn't put my finger on it. Numb and suddenly exhausted, I let them put me back on the couch and tend to my injuries. Most were minor, but I'd only barely escaped a few broken bones, and it was Dr. Lucas' considered opinion that I'd be pissing blood for a couple of days from the pounding my kidneys took. Still, it could have been much worse. I could have ended up like poor Diaz.

Eventually, they decided I could nap for a while before heading home and left me alone. I closed my eyes and let the hum of the Nursery lull me to sleep. Poor Diaz, I thought. Barely dead and her parents sticking her in the ground before anyone had a chance to say goodbye decently.

Her parents....

I sat bolt upright.

Diaz's parents had died 15 years ago. She'd told me that herself one time when I was being a particular pain in the ass about having to drive home for Thanksgiving. "Be thankful you've got them," she said. Her words had cut like ice.

With a groan, I heaved myself off my couch. The pain was bearable, if I didn't do anything stupid, like walk.

I took a deep breath and walked toward the exit. The associate on monitor duty looked up from her desk with alarm. "Mr. Rubinelli! You're not supposed to be walking around."

"I do lots of things I'm not supposed to," I replied, and threw my best fratboy leer at her. It had the desired effect. She blushed and turned away, and in that instant I did the stupidest thing imaginable: I ran.

Diaz lived in one of the new gated communities up along 202, all stucco facades, swimming pools and black iron gates that a real burglar could have bypassed in 30 seconds flat. Unfortunately, my days of breaking and entering are in the distant past,

Her lips were the grey of rotted meat, and her expression was one of infinite sadness.

so I decided I'd take the easier way in. I pulled my car (brand new 300Z, black paint job — I told you this gig paid nicely) into the parking lot of a strip mall a few blocks down and closed my eyes. The front seat of a car, even a nice car, isn't the ideal place to go under, but it'll do in a pinch.

Within a minute, I was out of my body and heading back for her place.

The gate was closed when I got there, not that it mattered — I just stepped on through, then looked for Diaz's apartment. I had a vague memory of the address — she'd invited me to her housewarming, back in the day, and I remembered the number because it matched my mother's birthday. Otherwise, I had no real sense of where it was in the complex, so it took me half an hour of scouting to find the right building. They were all identical, arranged in no particular order and set up so that the greatest number of parking spaces could be squeezed onto the least amount of asphalt. Some genius, however, had been kind enough to stick small signs directing people to the appropriate buildings. Off to the left were 100 through 800, 900 to 1500 were straight ahead and 1600 to 1900 were on the right.

Diaz lived — had lived — in 908. It was a first floor apartment, and someone at the party had teased her about it not being safe. She'd torn him a new one. It didn't seem so funny now.

It took a moment to find 908's front door, and another to find the corresponding back patio. After the Friedlander incident, no way was I going in the front door again. Instead, I moved across the patio, pockmarked with cheap green lawn furniture, and listened for sounds inside. There weren't any. I smirked. This was starting to sound familiar. Gently, I slipped through the glass door and into the apartment.

Everything was as I remembered it from the house-warming two years back. Clearly her "parents" hadn't been by to root through the place. Books still sat on bookshelves, and DVDs still rested on the floor near the TV. On the wall, a tasteful wall hanging showed something that looked like llamas in grays and tans. The refrigerator hummed merrily to itself. It seemed quite peaceful.

"Come on out, Rebecca," I said. "You're not fooling me this time."

She came out of the bedroom, eyes wide and face gaunt. I could see how translucent her skin was, how black

traceries of veins showed in the flesh and through the whites of her eyes. Her lips were the grey of rotted meat, and her expression was one of infinite sadness. "I suppose I should say I'm sorry, Tony," she said, but I held up my hand, stopping her.

"No apologies. They're a waste of time. You're really dead, aren't you?"

She shook her head. "No. Not really. Not in a way that matters."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" I took a step toward her, and she drew back.

"You can't understand it, Tony. Not yet, anyway. Not until Bishop's finished with you." Her voice was quiet and even. I'd heard that tone before, in the voices of kids I'd pulled out of cults. It had pissed me off then, and it was pissing me off now.

"What happens when I finish with Bishop, you mean. Jesus, Rebecca, you nearly got me killed out there. You set me up, you let him kill you. Friedlander, the job, the whole thing—why?"

She shrugged hopelessly. "Because he asked me to."
Very softly, she added, "I was

Very softly, she added, "I was hoping it wouldn't hurt."

"Gee, thanks." I reached forward and grabbed her wrist. "We're going back to Orpheus, Diaz. I'm taking you with me, and we're going to have one hell of a long talk."

"I don't think so, Tony," she replied, and threw me across the room. I hit the ground hard, all the day's earlier agony rising in my throat to strangle me.

She advanced on me. "I really am sorry, Tony," she said, "but here's where it ends. I knew you'd come looking for me."

I lurched to my feet and tried summoning some kind of defense, but she brushed my guard aside and nearly took

my head off with a roundhouse. Her nails were growing longer now, I saw, and sharper as well. One sliced my cheek open, nearly to the bone. Another whistled past my eyes. "Surrender," she said dully. "You can't get away."

"Why are you doing this?" I asked, and ducked under another swing. "What does Bishop have on you?"

She smiled, as if remembering a pleasant memory. Her real-life smile had been far more pleasant — all the teeth pointed the same way, for one thing. "I met him a long time ago. I was afraid of him then. I'm not afraid now."

Something clicked into place. "So that's why you quit skimming. You were afraid you'd find Bishop again."

"Yes." Scales emerged on her skin now; the punch I landed on her shoulder just skidded off harmlessly. "You found him, and through you, he found me again. And now everything is going to be all right."

"Everything indeed," said a voice behind me. Despite myself, I turned.

It was Bishop, as thin, quiet and intense as I remembered him, with a preacher's smile and a killer's eyes. "It's a pleasure to meet you again, Mister Rubinelli. So sad you won't be staying."

My shoulder blades itched where Diaz's gaze touched them, but I didn't look back at her. She wouldn't attack me now, not while Bishop was talking. It would buy me maybe five seconds, but that was all I needed.

"I'm leaving, Bishop. And I'm going to find you, and I'm going to kill you."

"You are, are you?" He leaned forward, and somehow I could smell rotting meat on his nonexistent breath. "Oh, I don't think that's possible. Not any more."

"I'll find you," I promised.

He looked past me. "Rebecca dearest," he said, "your friend is boring me. Do something about it."

With a shriek, she leaped for me. Closing my eyes, I gave the command that would pull me back along my silver cord, the invisible connection that held me to my body. I never had to do it this quickly before. I didn't know how fast it would go, and I didn't know if it would be fast enough.

I could hear Rebecca's screams and then, like a run-away kite, I was gone. Rebecca's howl faded in the distance. So did Bishop's last words....

"I don't need a body anymore. But you do."

Waking up in the car was less pleasant, if that were possible, than waking up on the couch had been earlier. I slammed back into my body. My bruises had bruises atop them, and my nose felt like it was broken. I sucked each breath through sandpaper, but I was alive.

Alive.

The word terrified me for some reason, because I knew it no longer applied to Bishop and Diaz.

"Tell Orpheus," I mumbled to myself. "You need to tell someone at Orpheus, now." I threw the car into gear and pulled out of the parking lot. Even turning the steering wheel hurt like hell, but I couldn't linger here, not so close to where they were.

It took me an extra half-hour to get back to the office. Diaz's apartment complex was on the way back, and something told me it was a good idea to take the long way around tonight.

Closing my eyes, I gave

thecommandthatwould

pull me back along my

silver cord, the invisible

connection that held me

to my body. I never had

to do it this quickly be-

fore. I didn't know how

fast it would go, and I

didn't know if it would be

fast enough.

INTRODUCTION

Cole Sear: I see dead people ...

Malcolm Crowe: Dead people like, in graves? In coffins? Cole Sear: Walking around like regular people. They don't see each other. They only see what they want to see. They don't know they're dead.

Malcolm Crowe: How often do you see them? Cole Sear: All the time.

- The Sixth Sense

On a long enough timeline, the survival rate for everyone drops to zero.

- Fight Club

The book you now hold represents a new direction for White Wolf Game Studio. While it is, indeed, the core book for a new World of Darkness game featuring the restless dead, it is also a great deal more than that. It is an experiment rarely, if ever explored, or touched upon in gaming. While the core book is indeed the main sourcebook for a new game, it is also the first in a *limited run series*. That's right. The story of this unique game unfolds over successive supplements, six in all including this book, each revealing some new information (both mechanical and narrative) while taking the setting as a whole forward another step.

The entire concept on which the series is predicated is based on the cinematic experience. Most films (and almost every suspense/thriller) follow a certain outline by which they narrate a story to greatest effect and with the greatest possible impact on viewers. This six-part limited run series follows that formula, with the first book acting like the first 20 minutes of the film, introducing the major characters and establishing the elements of both the story and setting. From here, the action and tension only increase (and at an exponential rate) with each successive release, until the final book in the series, which resolves all loose ends and allows the characters to affect reality in truly dramatic ways.

Welcome to the world of Orpheus.

ORPHEUSGROUP

Each character in an **Orpheus** chronicle is a member of a private, well-funded organization known as Orpheus Group. The group's mission statement involves helping distraught citizens obtain closure in matters pertaining to departed friends and loved ones. Imagine what would happen if the boy from *The Sixth Sense* grew up to form his own "ghostbusting" organization and you're on the right track. Rather than destroying or capturing ghosts, however, Orpheus Group agents seek to understand and communicate with them... mostly. The exact nature of each mission varies with the client, of course (and on occasion, with company directives). The company charges a nominal fee for its services, of course, since without money, none of their efforts would be possible.

Also known to the general public, however, is the manner in which Orpheus Group accomplishes its task. It carefully selects each prospective agent, for only those with the right background can function in the capacity of agent. Only those who survived multiple near-death experiences make it past the initial screening phase, and even then, only a handful makes it through the advanced training. Agents of Orpheus Group can communicate with the dead because they don't do the bulk of their work among the living — they actually join the dead, by projecting their souls from their bodies!

Some agents accomplish this through meditation alone, but others (those who haven't mastered this technique) are placed in a deep, coma-like state using cryogenics and embalming cocktails to ensure their body stays "dead" without actually undergoing necrosis. From there, the agent's soul is free to roam, and in this state, he can and will encounter other spooks. Neither is character option limited there. Orpheus also "employs" ghosts, those people with the wherewithal to survive past death. Between Orpheus' so-called "projectors" and ghosts, the afterlife is mankind's newest frontier.

It is from these perspectives that characters will experience the series as it unfolds, and it is in this state they will come to see their world for what it truly is... and is no longer.

THE WORLD OF ORPHEUS

Orpheus' setting is the World of Darkness, a world very similar to our own, but different in unpleasant ways. The world of Orpheus Group is a reality twisted by the unwavering attentions of the supernatural. Evil, frustration, insecurity and malice are all commonplace here. It is also a world of teetering imbalance, where the cosmic cycle is not so much a given as it is in our reality; a place that denies many souls their proper reward after death and corrupts others still by their own ill virtues.

On the surface, the World of Darkness looks like the "real world" we all know. Civilization advances to the same degree, it shares the same history and the daily ebb and flow of life continue much as they always have by our reckoning. But here, that which despoils and suffers gets the lion's share. Where there should be violence, there is unfathomable brutality; where graft exists, one finds deep rooted corruption instead. Much more present in this world than in ours is the ubiquitous undercurrent of both horror and mystery. The world's problems are more pronounced and stymie those few who seek solutions to its ineffable mysteries. This is where even fears have edges, and where hope's light is more than a little faded. This is a blighted place where restless ghosts walk the earth by night... and day.

This is the World of Darkness. Stay a while....

MANHIND ASCENDANT

Perhaps pivotal to **Orpheus** is a near-unstated fact that humanity is important and central to the environment. People are not the victims of supernatural "others," and the ability of some to project is almost entirely humancentric. In fact the game isn't about spooks or projected entities existing outside society; their interactions with people are what factor most significantly. Ghost stories are intrinsically and terribly human, and unlike vampires

and werewolves, which shun that aspect of themselves or make a concerted effort to remain alienated by virtue of their existence, **Orpheus** and its ghosts are about people. Orpheus Group is about people's ingenuity and their exploration of the afterlife. It's about helping one another regardless the relative costs to ourselves.

GHOST STORIES FORGHOSTS

Beyond the rules and nifty effects, Orpheus is also about telling ghost stories for ghosts. One of the most significant aspects to telling a ghost story is maintaining the air of mystery and suspense, the one that sets the reader's own imagination working against him. Stephen King once said that until the audience or reader "sees" the monster, it is a creature of unfathomable horror because the viewer's/reader's imagination adds the personal touches he believes frightening. Once folks see the thing or read its description, however, they're generally disappointed because it rarely meets the expectation they established in their own heads. People want to be scared, and will add those necessary elements into a story that frighten them the most. Once you say "this is how it is," however, your description will rarely surpass their personal criteria. Think of Alien, which was a great horror flick for offering partial views of the creature and never revealing its full dimensions. What kept the monster frightening was that constant uncertainty throughout the story. Other films show the monster from the get-go, using the action as the movie's vehicle and mistaking suspense for fright; this often degrades into gory slasher fictions and films. Once you had seen Freddy, Michael or Jason in full glory, none of the sequels could do the originals justice. The films went from horror to pure schlock because the villain lost all mystery and had to rely on a new gimmick to horrify audiences. Worse yet, achieving horror in gaming is even more difficult when the creatures in question are not only exposed visually, but fully statted out like a baseball card.

Therefore, while this series possesses definitive parameters, those constraints are revealed slowly and over time. In part it is to maintain the element of suspense and surprise by revealing things in small measures, but it also liberates the Storyteller from adhering to "established" canon. **Orpheus** is what you make of it, and you can forgo certain events or directions because the story you're telling with the players is ultimately more important than White Wolf dogma. So go ahead and tell your ghost stories for ghosts without defining all the parameters. Effective horror is about restricting the viewer's senses or robbing them of their certainties. It's about describing the noise and not that which made the noise. It's about describing the shadow and not what cast the shadow.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Orpheus falls into five main chapters and an appendix, each of which explores and explains a broad area of the game. You'll find all the rules and systems you need to play Orpheus, and will not strictly need any subsequent releases to find fulfilling entertainment. The rest of the series is presented so players and Storytellers can take their troupes through the metaplot we have in store for them. Each book, however, also includes enough information for Storytellers maintaining the status quo of a specific book or running her own style of chronicle. Each book adds all-new possibilities to character creation and development, as well.

THE MOVIE MODEL

Orpheus applies a movie model to the limited series. Most movies follow a very basic structure. The first 20 minutes or so establishes the situation. Look at *Stir of Echoes*, where we watch Kevin Bacon interact normally with his family and surroundings. In *Dragonfly*, Kevin Costner's wife is dead, and he's burying himself in work. In *The Sixth Sense*, Bruce Willis is a successful doctor now approaching a seemingly troubled boy.

The first major plot twist comes into play 15 to 20 minutes in, after we establish the world's reality; the twist then helps frame the action for the series. Think about it. Twenty minutes to establish Ripley's return in Aliens before the first major plot twist... we're going back with the marines. *Hollow Man...* 20 minutes into the flick, Bacon tests the drug on himself. Deep Blue Sea... the shark breaks into the facility. Thirteen Ghosts/House on Haunted Hill/The Haunting... welcome to the house. These are the story elements that send the characters on their way to adventure, whether willing or unwilling. This changes the realities of the characters' lives as they stood a few moments ago, kicking off the action and the movie the readers were promised in the previews. In Stir of Echoes, Kevin Bacon is hypnotized and undergoes his first encounters with the supernatural. In Dragonfly, Kevin Costner has his first overt brushes with the afterlife in the form of the bald-headed boy. In The Sixth Sense, Haley Joel Osment agrees to Bruce Willis' help.

The next segment deals with characters getting trounced by the situation, possibly with several twists more to keep the action from growing stale. *Aliens:* The aliens hand the marines' asses to them, the facility is about to go nuclear, the aliens breach the facility, corporate snitch betrays Ripley, etc. Numerous plot twists make for good action some directors believe, and **Orpheus** is certainly applying that model with

liberal brushstrokes. The characters are victimized by circumstance, buffeted about by the moment or outside force that threw them together. This is an important series of steps that normally covers the next 40 to 90 minutes of the flick. It's the characters' progression where multiple ordeals and minor twists along the way galvanize and bring them together as a team after some period of duress. Many movies have three or four such twists with one significant event smack dab in the middle of the movie. In Stir of Echoes, the minor twists are the continued hauntings that threaten to tear the family apart. The major scene revolves around Kevin Bacon trying to help the ghost. In *Dragonfly*, the minor events are Costner's encounters with the supernatural and the questions that arise from them. The linchpin scene is his discussion with the nun, when he finally admits that he believes in everything that's happened (and the nun confirms his beliefs). In The Sixth Sense, the minor turning points include various hauntings and incidents, while the significant event is Bruce Willis finally believing in the supernatural as well.

The last 20 minutes of the movie deals with the resolution, where the character turns from victim to hero. The last 20 minutes is where the characters scheme and plot to force a resolution in their favor. The characters hunt for Freddy Kruger, Ripley goes to rescue Newt, the characters have a way out of the house, etc. This final point carries us through the last segment of the movie. For some, this transition might be accepting one's fate, while for others, it means fighting against it. Regardless, the final plot twist usually coincides with a change in the characters or their perceptions. In Stir of Echoes, Kevin Bacon realizes where the girl's corpse is buried. In Dragonfly, Costner finally understands what his wife's been trying to tell him, and goes to find the rainbow. In The Sixth Sense, the troubled boy finally faces his fears and chooses to help the spirits rather than fear them. The twist endings in Stir of Echoes, Dragonfly and The Sixth Sense are just that, twist endings that draw upon subtle story elements to offer some foreshadowing without the audience ever knowing they were being told.

Watch almost any Hollywood flick and time it... it'll follow this outline like clockwork.

With that model in mind... **Orpheus**, the core book, establishes the world's realities or what players should expect of life around them like the opening premise of the movie, those first 15 to 20 minutes before the major plot twist. Like 13 Ghosts, however, the beginning is also thunder and blood....

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

Aside from the Prologue and Introduction, **Orpheus** has five main chapters and one appendix with vital information for the game. Read the material, take care to skip over the

Storyteller-only portions (if you plan on playing **Orpheus**), then throw everything out the window if need be and play the style of game you want. We have a story in mind, but it doesn't mean you're stuck here having to listen to it.

Also, bear in mind that you will find supporting persona sidebars in chapters Two and Five. Because there is no "city-book" for the series, we included example supporting characters to best illustrate a type of monster or character type, thus providing the Storyteller with ready-made personalities to interject into any chronicle.

Chapter One: World of the Dead contains material for everyone to read, and it covers the realities of the world as understood by the world. Therefore, the material is often in-character, meaning it's told through a variety of media including newspaper clippings, emails, phone call transcripts, etc. This allows us to flavor the world without revealing the meta-plot overtly or establishing "canon." This chapter deals specifically with Orpheus Group, people's reactions to it and how it operates.

Chapter Two: Shades, Laments and Horrible Things acquaints the reader with their characters, as well as their capabilities. Therefore it is for Storyteller and player alike. This chapter covers the different "classes" or *Shades* of character, as well as their powers or *Horrors*. This chapter also encompasses the four "races" of supernatural entities in **Orpheus** called Laments.

Chapter Three: Character Creation is where we take the players and Storytellers through the process of making a character.

Chapter Four: Working the System is where we touch upon the game's mechanics and basic rules. While this may seem of interest to Storytellers mostly, we recommend players familiarize themselves with the rules so they know what they're capable of achieving.

Chapter Five: Storytelling the Dead is strictly for the Storyteller, and includes not only advice on playing Orpheus and involving the characters, but it contains a section called *Twisted Reflections* to arm the Storyteller with a who's who of antagonists.

Appendix: Ghost Stories finally wraps up everything with ready-to-play stories written as Orpheus mission briefings for those Storytellers and players eager to start a game right away. Using the literary axiom of "show, don't tell," the ghost stories also allow players to discover several secrets about the world through their characters' experiences. In that capacity, players are pivotal to the game. This section is strictly for Storytellers.

SERIES BREAKDOWN

Following the core book, the game's limited run progresses in much the same manner as would the action of a suspense film, with events building up with each successive revelation (supplement). These metaplot events

reach their climax in the final book of the series, with the progression as follows:

Supplement One — **Crusade of Ashes:** "This is Radio-Free Death, broadcasting <Static> all the ghosts and projectors out there <Static> survived the <Static> your heads down and <Static> ever stop running. <Static> won't stop chasing you."

Supplement Two — Shades of Gray: "<Static> reporting at least hundreds dead... and they're all <Static> here! Oh, God! <Static> happening again... <Static> Radio-Free Death, signing out."

Supplement Three — **Shadow Games:** "<Static> appeared in the sky. <Static> know what became of the rest. <Static> terrible liability, now that we know <Static> they serve. <Static> comes to that, we all may be in much bigger trouble <Static> we think...."

Supplement Four — **The Orphan-Grinders:** "This is Radio-Free Death <Static> one last time. <Static> never thought we would see the day <Static> To all who remain, if there's any hope left at all, it will be <Static>."

Final Supplement — End Game: <Static>

GAME TRAITS

As a new addition to the World of Darkness, **Orpheus** introduces several strange game mechanics into gaming vocabulary. As stated in the Lexicon below, some are "ingame" terms used by Orpheus Group agents, and some aren't. Regardless, these new Traits are core to the game and will likely feature prominently throughout the series.

Foremost among the game's core mechanics are Vitality and Spite. Together, these two Traits form the core of every character's being. In a real sense, a spook's "body" is only the psychological projection of his soul's emotional state and identity. Thus, one's Vitality is both his energy supply and his body, making Vitality the single most key Trait during gameplay. Spite is Vitality's evil twin; all the negative energy and emotions the character allowed to fester in the darkest recesses of his psyche. When Spite overtakes Vitality, the character begins slipping away from the person he believes, or wants to believe, himself to be.

Related to, and affected by, these two core Traits are what are known as Stains — mutations to one's ghostly form resulting when personal insecurities and anxieties warp a character's very sense of a self to a significant degree. Each Stain makes the character seem all that much more inhuman, and those with multiple Stains barely resemble the people they are (or were) in real life, at all.

Character creation for **Orpheus** is slightly different from other World of Darkness characters, as well. Rather than a series of "splats" (nice and easy character groupings, like clan, tribe, tradition or house), characters in this game are, to a great extent, more personalized. Each

character receives a Shade (character template of which there are five: Banshee, Haunter, Poltergeist, Skinrider and Will-o'-the-Wisp) and a Lament ("race" of ghost or projected entity, of which there are two classes: ghost and projector, and two subsets each), but more than anything, it is one's Nature and role option that determines the core of his personality. These mechanics are in place to allow for individuals to remain individuals, while still providing some necessary stratification (you can find details on character creation in Chapter Three)

LEXICON

As with any organization, Orpheus agents have their own slang and verbal shorthand to describe their existence, their powers and situations they fall into. The terms used are generally of two sorts. Some are easy colloquialisms coined by agents on the job, with a natural prejudice towards the dramatic and descriptive. Scientists and researchers from the Orpheus Group created the others, leaning more towards scientific terminology, precise phrasing or complicated jokes in classical languages that only one agent in a hundred understands. Agent slang is far more common than researcher slang — among agents, at least.

The game, too, has its fair share of specific terms and phrases, and without a guide of sorts, the lot may very well degenerate into alphabet soup before long. Thus, the most important game terms are also presented here for your reference, with (IC) indicating the entry is used mostly "In Game" and (OC) as pure gaming terminology. Those without designations are used in both situations.

Beach: Vacation or down-time between missions; usually a week or longer.

Big Bad, The (IC): A powerful ghost or projected entity commanding several others or controlling a group of humans in some way.

Black Heroin: Pigment (q.v.)

Blips: Ghosts with 2 or 3 Vitality, generally interpreted as near-functional by agents. "We've got two blips here; I think I can handle it, but be ready to send in backup." Also called "reactives" (IC) by Orpheus.

Breaker (IC): Slang term for a Poltergeist.

Control Freak (IC): Slang term for a Skinrider.

Cradles: Sleeper cryo-suspension tubes. Also called "coffins" (IC).

Crucible: A circle of ghosts and projected entities; to indicate a group's disparate interests working together. "So they asked our crucible to look into the mess...."

Deadheads (IC): Pigment addicts. "I hate deadheads — it's like they can see us."

Death Merchants: Freelance mercenary projectors.

Drones: Ghosts with 1 Vitality; ones on the bottom rung of the disembodied scale from a character's

perspective: "Nothing but drones here." Often called "static repeaters" (IC) by Orpheus agents.

Flicker (IC): Slang term for a Wisp.

Fumigation: A mission involving ridding a place of ghosts and projected entities, usually by destroying them; more commonly used by researchers than agents. "Today's assignment is a straight fumigation run..."

Gauze: A spook's body; a reference to its appearance. "Its gauze was in pieces, and it didn't have any fight left."

Ghosts: Nonprojecting spooks. There are two types of character ghosts: spirits (or normal ghosts) and hues (pigment users). "So we figured it was a ghost, but we weren't sure whether it was a hue or not...."

Go Zero (IC): When a skimmer leaves her meat behind and projects out of her body. "She went zero in five seconds flat; I was impressed."

Horrors: Powers used by projectors or ghosts. "How was I supposed to know he had a horror like that?"

Horror Show (IC): Illegal operation where a client hires Orpheus to terrify the target, usually reducing him to insanity (or a nervous breakdown) or causing a (possibly fatal) accident.

Hue: A ghost who was a pigment user in life, essentially different from a **spirit**.

Jasons: Normal humans possessed by insane spooks or Spectres, and acting in a violent, homicidal, serial-killer sort of way.

Lament: A character's "race" or species, as defined by projector or ghost. "Please state the target's Lament in the box at the top of the form."

Maelstrom: A great event that swept away many ghosts several years ago, but which little is known about at the moment except for vague rumors and whispered stories.

Malkovich (IC): A term for a Skinrider's host or someone being controlled.

Manifesting: A ghost's or projected entity's ability to appear and interact with the living. "So then he manifested, and things really went to hell in a hand basket."

Meat, The (IC): Slang term for the physical body when a **skimmer** or **sleeper** abandons it to project. "She left her meat behind and went through the wall."

Networking (IC): Sharing Vitality inside a crucible. Used predominantly by agents.

Nothing, The: A rumor spread by some ghosts about what lies beyond death for *them*, and what happens when a ghost is utterly destroyed. Understandably, there's a lack of evidence.

Pigment: A new hallucinogen, also known as **black heroin**, currently on the streets. Addictive but cheap, and popular among the casual drug crowd (like college students and ravers).

Plasm: Technical term for gauze.

Project Echo: The Orpheus Group's investigation, creation and use of projectors.

Projectors: Humans who can send their souls out of body. Some are **skimmers** (q.v.), some **sleepers** (q.v.), but also called "projected/projecting entities." "We figured him for a projector; the hard part was finding where he'd left his body."

Puppetmaster (IC): Slang term for a Skinrider.

Quick, The: Nobody at Orpheus knows how this term came into parlance, but it's a reference to "the quick and the dead," and thus indicates the living.

Rave (IC): Fight involving multiple spooks of any kind.

Ripcording (IC): Act of a skimmer returning to his body immediately. Usually used as a last ditch method of escape since the act damages the body.

Screamer (IC): Slang term for a Banshee.

Shade: One of five types of character templates governing a ghost's outlook.

Shroud, the: The mystical veil separating this world from the one that's supposedly beyond it; known in some circles as the "Stormwall."

Skimmers: An agent who projects from her body using yogic techniques. "Skimmers get it easy, they just drop the meat and go zero."

Sleepers: An agent who's been flatlined and whose body is in cryogenic suspension. "Yeah, I'm a sleeper. And yeah, I do miss the sex."

Snow Job (IC): Orpheus slang for a mission that looks too easy. "Looks like a snow job to me."

Special Effects (or F/X; IC): Any Horrors or Stains. Often used in public situations when conversation needs to sound innocuous.

Spirit: A ghost-type Lament; spirits are the most common form of ghost, and the two terms are often interchangeable.

Spite: Negative energy and emotions that collect to darken a spook's soul.

Spook: This refers to both ghosts and projecting entities since ghost is actually a type of Lament; essentially a ubiquitous term for anybody in gauze or without a body.

Squatter (IC): Slang term for a Haunter.

Stains: Physical deformities that appear on some ghosts and projecting entities who frequently give way to violent passions or personal bitterness. They often provide some sort of physical protection or advantage to the character, however. "She was showing stains; nails six inches long, teeth like a wolverine."

Thorns (OC): A Spectre's innate powers.

Vibe (IC): The possible presence of supernatural elements. "I'm picking up a vibe."

Vitality: The force of personality of a spook; the resonance of life within it. Drones and blips have scarcely any Vitality, but crucibles typically have a high Vitality.

Wastelands, the: Rumored world of the dead being ravaged by the Maelstrom on the other side of the Shroud.

LIVE-ACTION

While the majority of Orpheus games take place among friends, around a tabletop, the game is such that it needn't be restricted to that medium. In place of dice and declarations about a character's actions, a player can opt to experience the world and the thrill of being an Orpheus Group agent in a more theatrical and dramatic fashion known as LARPing (live-action roleplaying). This type of gaming shares much in common with improvisational theatre, where the players actually dress in-character and act out their characters' scenes in real time. Rather than stating that one's character is opening a door for his fellow crucible-mates, for example, he would actually move to the door and open it for himself. And if his fellow agents were on the other side of that door in the story, then the players of those characters would (or should) be there in life, as well.

Obviously, the players will still require some guidance in the proper execution of the story, and there must always be someone mediating disputes and issuing game rulings; this is where the Storyteller comes in. Just like in table-top gaming, the Storyteller establishes the parameters of the story for the players: The basic plot, the setting of the game's action, any nonplayer characters, and the like. From there, the Storyteller sets the players loose to make the game their own, guiding them into and around the plot along the way, while ensuring everything runs smoothly and no players (or characters) are left in the lurch.

As stated, live-action roleplaying typically avoids dice use since whipping them out in the middle of a tense scene tends to kill the drama a bit. Alternative systems, such as those created by and presented in White Wolf's **Mind's Eye Theatre** products, replace the need for dice when determining random results and conflict resolution during play. With luck (and a troupe of good players), most situations will resolve themselves through roleplaying alone.

SAFEGUARDS

Whatever system players and Storytellers use to adjudicate game mechanics and conflict resolution, some broad guidelines are necessary to ensure that live-action play remains safe and enjoyable for everyone involved. Unlike other rules in this book — rules concerning game content and mechanics — the Golden Rule does not apply to the following since these rules govern safe and legal live-action conduct.

- No Touching: Period, and non-negotiable. All combat and physical interaction must be handled through some abstract system (such as Mind's Eye Theatre's Rock-Paper-Scissors routine). No player should ever grab, strike or otherwise accost another player (or Storyteller) during the game, and the Storyteller has both a right and a responsibility to enforce this rule at all times.
- No Weapons: Playing an agent of a secretive special operations organization can fill one's head with images of guns, car chases and fancy gadgets. And that's what makes this rule all the more important in **Orpheus** games. Props like evocative make-up and dress are perfect for live-action games; weapons are not. No knives, no stakes and absolutely NO firearms of any kind. If a *character* carries a weapon, it should be represented by an index card with the word (and any relevant stats the item possesses) written on it. During combat challenges, this card is then presented and used to simulate the weapon in play.
- Play in Designated Areas: Live-action roleplaying is meant to take place in a home or other predetermined space. Regardless of where the gaming is held, it is important everyone in the area understands exactly what's taking place. Some games (especially those involving make-believe ghosts and projected entities, for example), may look disturbing or even frightening to those who aren't aware of what's going on. Don't try involving bystanders or passersby (and certainly don't act like they can't see you because you're a ghost). Not only is such behavior immature, it could lead to some major trouble of the real-world variety.
- Known When to Stop: If the Storyteller or Narrator calls for a time-out or other break in the action, the players must stop immediately. The Storyteller remains the final arbiter of all that transpires in his game. To wit, when he or she calls the game for the evening, put the costume (and props) away for the night.
- It's Only a Game: The point of all games is to have fun, and Orpheus chronicles are no exception. If a goal is not accomplished or one's character dies (again), it's not the end of the world for the player. Don't take the shared world created by the players and the Storyteller too seriously. After all, it's only fictional death. Sure, getting together at Denny's after the game to chow down and geek out is not only fine, but customary in some circles. But calling the Storyteller at home at the crack of early to pester him about changing a rule is taking things a bit too far.

RECOMMENDED VIEWING

Because the game's very design is patterned after a cinematic experience, several good films and television series may serve as inspiration, if not outright fodder, for **Orpheus** stories. Obtaining just the right feel and mood

is one of the most important things a Storyteller can accomplish in running these games, and the following sources of aesthetic should help in that regard:

The Changeling: George C. Scott gives a wonderful performance as a composer who moves into a new (but old) house after the death of his wife and son.

The Devil's Backbone: A positively gorgeous film about the ghost of a dead boy at an orphanage in wartorn Spain. Possibly Guillermo del Toro's finest film.

Dominique: In this oldie but goodie, Jean Simmons shines as a woman who hangs herself and comes back to haunt her beast of a husband.

The Fog: Tells the story of a small coastal town beset by all manner of creepiness after a strange fog rolls in from the sea. One of John Carpenter's best.

Ghost: It may be a little maudlin overall, but the scenes of Patrick Swayze's character getting to know his newfound existence are right on the money.

The Kingdom: Already a cult classic, this bizarre Danish miniseries focuses on the inhabitants of a modern hospital built atop a medieval graveyard.

The Others: Nicole Kidman shines as the mother of two light-sensitive children living in an isolated house on the Isle of Jersey during World War II.

Poltergeist: Tobe Hooper's wildly successful film about a suburban family terrorized by malevolent spirits.

The Ring: Although criticized by some die-hards for the "liberties" it takes with the original material, this Hollywood remake of the Japanese film Ringu remains one of the most terrifying and effective vengeful ghost stories ever put to film.

Session 9: A slow and methodical descent into madness concerning a five-man asbestos abatement crew that's been hired to clean up a condemned mental hospital.

The Sixth Sense: Incredibly well-done thriller concerning a psychologist encountering a child who can talk to the dead. If for some reason you've managed to avoid this movie until now, best to go ahead and bite the bullet. It's a gem.

Stephen King's Rose Red: Made-for-TV miniseries about a group of psychics in Seattle who try to re-energize the "dead cell" of a huge manor named Rose Red.

Stir of Echoes: Faithful adaptation of Richard Matheson's novel about a Chicago man whose reality begins crumbling after he undergoes hypnosis.

VIDEOGAME MADNESS& CHEAP SPECIAL EFFECTS

For Storytellers with too much time on their hands, take any of the horror games out there and pipe the console through the VCR first. This allows you to record any scene from your favorite horror game that you want

to use against the troupe. Think of it as low-level special effects, recorded on a videocassette. Great for establishing a setting shot of a location, a power effect of a monster or any cut scene you like enough to include in your game.

Eternal Darkness — Sanity's Requiem: For the Game-Cube, this horror game is among the more intelligent selections out there with a great feel for "lurking" horror. Interesting cut scenes include the opening cinema.

Fatal Frame: Sleeper hit video game on PS2 and X-Box with a cool concept surrounding a haunted mansion and snapping pictures of ghosts; great for those moviement camera angles. You can use the photos you've taken of ghosts to give players a visual for the ghosts they must hunt in the game (as part of their briefing).

Resident Evil: Not the movie! The first game has one puzzle involving a keypad and getting the right patterns to unlocking a door. Because the screen focuses only on the keypad and not the environment, Storytellers can pause the game at that puzzle, then have the players try to solve the puzzle as part of the story. This also works on the many Horror-survival games out there with their own puzzles (that focus only on the puzzle and not the game environment).

Silent Hill 1 and 2: Two video games that approach horror with a slick, movielike quality. Beautiful atmosphere pieces for Storytellers with the time to record certain stages just for the visual feel of sets like an abandoned town or mist-covered pathways.

Thirteen Ghosts: Okay, not a video game, but worth mentioning here for two reasons. Tony Shalhoub and Matthew Lillard are always worth the watch, but not even they can save this film from an atrocious script. Still... the DVD's opening menu has throaty chanting and monstrous SFX great for frightening players and characters alike. Just pipe the sound through the stereo system and turn off the television to establish mood with the chanting.

THE WORLD OF DARKNESS

Fans of Vampire: The Masquerade and the other World of Darkness games will doubtlessly wonder where the Orpheus Group fits in. Which supernatural being really controls the organization? The Giovanni? The Euthanatos? Or some heretofore undiscovered shadowy manipulator?

Sorry. None of the above. Orpheus knows that spooks exist, but have no evidence to suggest that other supernatural beings are any more than legend or, more likely,

misinterpretation of ghostly activity. The supernatural denizens of the World of Darkness keep their secrets very closely guarded, and Orpheus simply doesn't look for them. Everything they see is filtered through the lens of departed souls, and this willful tunnel vision makes them especially susceptible to the concealing efforts of the supernatural "community."

Likewise, these beings have not infiltrated Orpheus (yet). The main reason is that, initially, Orpheus was too young an organization to have attracted this kind of attention. Now, while Orpheus is still nascent, it is earning tremendous media coverage and is far more visible than most supernatural beings would like. Many fear approaching such an enterprise, knowing their own secrets might be unearthed in turn.

This does not mean, of course, that vampires, mages, etc., haven't noticed Orpheus and are not watching carefully for ways to use the agency. It simply means that, as of this writing, none have succeeded. You, in your chronicles, may use of any of the extensive settings provided in other World of Darkness games. Just remember that Orpheus is an organization created by mortals and for mortals, and it has no innate understanding of any of the secret world's deeper mysteries. Even the greenest neonate vampire might find their work just a little pedestrian.

Again, White Wolf wants to present a new idea and approach without the cosmological baggage brought on by other World of Darkness lines. This makes the game more accessible to new players unfamiliar with the intricacies of the other supernatural races, and it allows us to concentrate more on telling a single story without any extraneous threads. This may change further into the series, but for now, characters have plenty to worry about.

In game, Orpheus Group's research indicates that a spook's powers can explain other supernatural fables or stories. Animalistic ghosts possessing humans or skinriders with a perverse sense of humor might well give rise to all manner of werewolf legends — or similar shapechanging creatures. Poltergeist, Haunter and Banshee effects explain the more exotic stories of magic. Folklore about vampires may well be pre-Orpheus sleepers who left their bodies in some sort of trance state after being buried alive, and might even have felt compelled to drink blood due to cultural upbringing and native beliefs. Occam's Razor holds; why try postulating further supernatural entities when the existence of ghosts explains everything?

Hoyt Masterson was not a nervous man by nature. He'd seen a lot of crazy shit in his life. Hell, he'd done a lot of crazy shit. But today was different. Today he was doing something entirely unnatural, something... well, not being a religious man he hesitated thinking that it violated God's plan, but it was most definitely not within the realm of what Hoyt considered proper or right.

"Second thoughts?" Dr. Murthy Chandrawati asked.

"More like thirds or fourths. This whole affair's giving me the heebie-jeebies, Doc."

"There's absolutely no cause for concern, Mr. Masterson. Out in the field, things can sometimes get a little hairy. But this is a controlled environment where nothing gets in or out without us being aware of it. Trust me. You're safe as houses."

"I just don't like the idea of shooting up with some sort of trippy hallucinogen. I've seen first hand what that kinda shit can do t' folks."

"Don't concern yourself, Mr. Masterson," Dr. Chandrawati said absently, tapping the air out of a small syringe. "The compounds we use here are entirely natural and nonaddictive. Soon enough, the yoga techniques you've been studying will be all you'll need. The injections are just for beginners."

"I'm still not sure, Doc," Hoyt said, sitting bolt upright on the exam table. "Maybe this ain't such a good idea."

"Well if you insist," the doctor countered, raising an eyebrow, "there are always the sleeper cradles."

Hoyt thought long and hard about being locked into one of those stainless steel coffins, about being frozen to death, his blood replaced by a synthetic compound. About being dead for a month and a half until the doctors revive him — or at least try to....

Suddenly, the injection didn't sound so bad.

"Naw, Doc. That's OK. I'm good. Just a case of stage fright's all."

"I'm glad to hear it Mr. Masterson. Now relax. You'll feel a slight pinch." "Yow!"

"See, that wasn't so bad now was it?"

"It kinda burns."

"That's normal. Just relax... breathe, remember your exercises."

Hoyt remembered. He'd been prepped for this for weeks. He felt the initial burning from the injection turn to a gentle warmth spreading from his left arm to throughout his body. He'd been told to expect this, and wasn't too worried. Hoyt concentrated on the warmth, envisioning it radiating outward from a wellspring at the base of his spine. He then mentally planted the warmth there, centering himself in that same spot. Then, he moved his perception up his spinal cord, feeling the energy gather into whirling eddies when it reached certain points along the way. First, at the midpoint between his groin and his navel. Then, at the bellybutton. The heart. The throat. By the time the energy that was Hoyt Masterson's essence reached his forehead, it was a barely contained geyser of vitality, threatening to break free. When it reached the center-point of his skull, where spine and mind connect, the dam burst.

Hoyt found himself standing next to his body, watching Dr. Chandrawati writing down data from an EKG monitor hooked by a series of wires to Hoyt's — the other Hoyt's — head. Hoyt reached a hand out to get the doctor's attention, but it passed through the man's shoulder. Hoyt jerked his hand back as though burned and stared down at it. He barely had time to register it all before a body came hurtling through the wall to his right as if it weren't even there, bowling him over in the process.

"Holy shit! What the fuck!" Hoyt managed.

"Oh, Jesus. I'm so sorry. Here, let me help you up," said a petite woman with a Susan Powter haircut and tight jeans.

Hoyt gave her his hand and slowly stood. "What the Christ? You just came through the God-damn wall. That's unreal!"

"Oh, you must be the new guy. I'm another of the company spooks. Name's Katherine Dennison, but everybody calls me Kate."

Hoyt's face broke into a broad grin as he regained his wits. "Pleased to meet ya, Kate. Call me Hoyt."

"Hoyt, eh? Well Hoyt, let me tell you," Kate said, a faraway look piercing her eyes, "I see great things in store for you. Unbelievable things."

"Unbelievable, huh? More unbelievable than this?" Hoyt said, his grin growing even wider. "Tell me more."

CHAPTER ONE: World of the Dead



Sweet zombie Jeebus! Did ya see what that thing did to him with that fuckin' scythe?

-Hoyt Masterson after his first encounter with a Reaper

Adam: We're not completely helpless, Barbara. I've been reading that book and there's a word for people in our situation: ghosts.

- Beetlejuice



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A Letter from the Editor

The loyal readers of The Scrutinizer have always known that ghosts are real.

Since our presses first started rolling in 1963, we printed countless stories filled with first-person accounts of spirits of the dead reaching out from beyond the grave to comfort their loved ones — or take bitter revenge against those who wronged them. The ring of truth in these stories, whether poignant or terrifying, struck a chord with many readers, who sent in their own, personal tales of ghostly encounters. Every single story that you sent in, whether we printed it within these pages or not, we saved, carefully filed away for posterity.

Ladies and gentlemen, posterity starts now! The Scrutinizer proudly announces a ground-breaking agreement with Orpheus Group, the company pioneering the push into the spirit world. In exchange for access to our extensive paranormal records, Orpheus Group has appointed a professional post-life consultant to our staff, Ms. Darcy Lamanna, to ensure our readers receive the information about the afterlife that they need and deserve. We are proud to work side by side with Orpheus Group, scientists unafraid to buck the dogmatic assumptions of their skeptical peers in search of The Truth.

This collaboration between The Scrutinizer and Orpheus Group has already borne fruit. Within the pages of this special double-sized issue (an incredible bargain at the same cover price as a normal issue!), Ms. Lamanna and our tireless archival staff reach deep into our files to take a closer look at some of our most vivid ghost stories, with pop-culture references for those of you who lack personal experience with ghostly visitors. Ms. Lamanna also gives us an inside look at the brave and mysterious Orpheus Group agents, who push through the boundary between life and death every day, for the betterment of humankind.

Enjoy our special issue, and come back to these pages every week for more in-depth analysis from Ms. Lamanna and our professional staff of paranormal journalists!

Nelson

SPOOKS 101

or What Can You Do When You're Dead?

Maybe a loved one recently passed on. Perhaps you, or a member of your family, are close to death. Maybe you're a staunch believer in the Boy Scout motto "Be prepared" — after all, accidents, and worse, happen every day. There might just be strange sounds echoing from your basement. Or maybe you're simply insatiably curious about the supernatural (like the staff here at The Scrutinizer). Whatever the reason, our readers are clamoring to know: What's it like to be a ghost?

With the aid of our Orpheus Group expert, we put together a list of basic questions and answers. Later in these pages, we'll discuss different ghost types and the fantastic abilities they use to interact with the living world. This primer gives you the basics, the commonalties all ghosts share.

What is a ghost?

The answer is deceptively simple: A ghost is a person's soul, separated from his or her body by death. While science is slow in accepting the existence of ghosts (and so, by definition, the soul), many scientists would still love to know what constitutes ghosts, how they sustain themselves, where they go.... While researchers spend the next few centuries in the lab, we'll go on to more important questions!

Who becomes a ghost?

Again, this question has a very simple answer: Anyone who dies just might become a ghost. No single religious, cultural or

WHAT DO GHOSTS WANT?

As unique as every ghost is, most want the same thing... to move on. Unfortunately, some ghosts are so injured by the process of death that they don't actually realize that's what they want! These ghosts obsess on something, maybe repeating the motions of their last day among the living, or protecting a loved one. They may be so single-minded that they harm others in the pursuit of their imagined goals. Perhaps they scare or hurt the person who moves into their "living" space, or attack someone disciplining their child. "If a ghost becomes violent, it's time for professional help," says Orpheus Group expert Darcy Lamanna. If Orpheus doesn't have a field office nearby, you can always contact a local church group. If they don't have a priest or pastor who can perform an exorcism, they can direct you to other available local resources. Beware con artists! There are many shady characters around claiming to offer the same professional services as Orpheus (and a few credible competitors). There are some legitimate freelancers out there, but many more crooks. Demand trustworthy references before letting a stranger into your house!

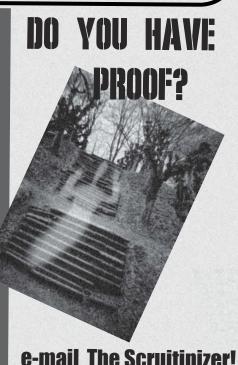
On the extreme end of the scale are highly self-aware and benevolent ghosts. They choose to remain here, postponing the rewards of the afterlife, because they are moved to help others — people or ghosts like themselves. If you've ever miraculously avoided a bad accident, been warned away from a devastating course of action, or felt strangely comforted when life's twists and turns become too much to bear, maybe you've been helped by a ghost!

In the middle are average, every-day ghosts, who were once normal folks like you and me (isn't it a marvelous world where we can talk about every-day ghosts!). They would prefer to move on to the afterlife, but may need a little help. On her first day in our offices, Ms. Lamanna shared a story about the ghost of a young woman. She was trapped here by the fear her house would burn down with the children inside because she'd left the toaster plugged in. Ms. Lamanna went to her house, unplugged the toaster, and the young woman's ghost departed through a doorway of light. Even as an untrained lay person, you may be able to help a ghost too, particularly if the ghost is someone you knew or were close to in life. But remember, ghosts can be tricky—it may not be a loved one at all, but a cunning manipulator feeding from your memories and life force. "The terrifying ordeal of an untimely death can change those we love for the worse," counsels Ms. Lamanna, "so if at any point you feel uncomfortable or threatened, leave the area and seek help."

geographic group is more populous in the spirit world than any other (though any honest paranormal researcher admits that taking a census of the dead is problematic!). Orpheus Group believes the victims of a sudden, violent death (accidents, murder and war) are more highly represented, as are those who died feeling they left something undone. Even the most organized and content person might die on a bad day, so everyone should work out ghost contingency plans in advance with their loved ones! (Go to "http://www.thescrutinizer.com" to download our Ghost Planner today!)

What does a ghost look like?

Experts agree that, in their natural state, ghosts are incorporeal (meaning they have no material body) and invisible (meaning they can't be seen). A ghost can choose to be seen, perhaps showing itself as a glowing ball of light or a misty human figure. It might speak in whispers, or communicate through written words or rapping in Morse code. It might even form a material body of sorts, pulling together objects, or dust and dirt, into a crude representation. Every ghost looks different, of course, since each ghost was once a person. Many ghosts also bear their death marks when appearing to the living, but our experts are divided as to whether this is a scare tactic, or an involuntary response to the trauma of death.



TALES FROM OUR FILES:

The classic horror film Poltergeist, which depicts an ordinary family under assault from angry ghosts, struck close to home for many of our readers who felt first-hand the eerie physical strength of such entities. Mrs. Jody Carlton of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, sent a letter about a ghost in her kitchen that "started with annoying, yet harmless, pranks, like tipping over a canister of flour... but then escalated to murderous behavior like spilling boiling liquids and flinging cutlery." Mr. Guy Macko of luneau, Alaska, wrote about his grandmother's ghost who reclaimed her heir loom locket whenever his wife removed it. Mrs. Mallory Ishak of Towanda, Pennsylvania, sent us the touching story of the ghost who comforted her newborn daughter by rocking the cradle when the baby fussed, and may have even saved the infant from choking. Ms. Lamanna confirms these supernatural feats are all within the capabilities of a type of ghost. Orpheus Group retains the German phrase "Poltergeist," or "knocking spirit," for these entities, some of which can move only the lightest objects, like a coin or a ring, while others can hurl heavy furniture across a room. Ms. Lamanna clarified that "Unlike the fictional ghosts in the movie,

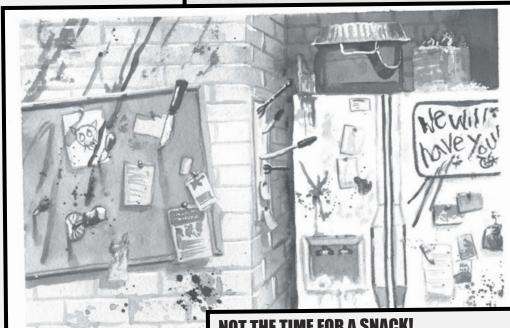
these entities are not capable of interacting with electronics like televisions or telephones. Poltergeists often form when the deceased was very angry or frustrated, either by his life or the cause of his death; conversely, a playful Poltergeist may have simply been bubbly and full of verve.

Anothermovie ably introduces another type of ghostly emanation. The Amityville Horror showed the terrifying results of ghosts taking a family home

for themselves — or perhaps vice versa. Mrs. Alison McBeath from Evert, Michigan, wrote to us about the loud knocks and groans from the attic of her home.

THE TYPES OF CHOSTS!

"The sounds stopped after we found a woman's body in a long-forgotten trunk wedged among the rafters. We gave the poor, unknown soul a decent burial after seventy years of torment." Mr. Earl Bisette of Utica, New York, told of his encounter with a bloodthirsty hay baler that had a history of mangling limbs and even taking lives. Past owners had simply sold the machine, leaving the new owner in grave danger; Mr. Bisette wisely destroyed it, but not before the possessed machine ripped off his left arm. Ms. Lamanna defined these ghosts as "Haunters," with the capability to infuse their spiritual essence into an object, location or domicile. Even experts often confuse them with Poltergeists, since both types of ghost can move objects, but careful observation shows a distinction: A Haunter can only move parts of the object it possesses, like slamming the door of a haunted house, or making a haunted music box play. Also, unlike Poltergeists, Haunters may possess electrical devices, resulting in electrical



Jody Carlton's Kichen after a particularly bad Poltergeist attack!

disturbances and causing those items to malfunction. Haunting emanations take root when a person was obsessed with a place or object in life, or, just the opposite, had no real attachment to material things, using things for a short time then moving on. The first type is often most dangerous — trained individuals can convince a vagabond ghost to move on, but an obsessed Haunter may become violent if anyone attempts to remove it.

Many of our readers sent in stories of ghostly encounters where the shade was intent on communicating some vital bit of information. Mr. Tyrone Bittle of Waldport, Oregon, noted a spirit presence in his house. The ghost, however, never directly contacted him until Mr. Bittle was about to lose his home to foreclosure, at which point the ghost directed him to a stash of valuable old coins hidden behind a plaster wall. Mrs. Jamie Schroeter of Manassas, Virginia, wrote of her sister's heartbreaking haunting by a wailing ghost who screamed the night each of her innocent babies was taken by crib death — but never with enough warning to save the poor infants. Ms. Lamanna classified these communicative ghosts as "Banshees," a name borrowed from the Irish legends of wailing women. *The Sixth*

Sense is a passable example of a beneficent Banshee, the ghost of a man who made his living through the spoken word and took his therapeutic touch with him beyond the grave. While the ghost from the movie, and the one encountered by Mr. Bittle, seek to help the living, many others act from anger or envy, at best demanding attention from the living to fuel their cold existences, or at worst, driving people mad with their tormented

whispers and unearthly wails.

The penultimate ghost on our frequent encounters list has the charmingly antiquated name "Will-o'-the-Wisp." It's another name taken from folklore: In most tales these ghosts led travelers astray from safe paths by mimicking a lantern's glow, but in others they led bold adventuresome types to hidden treasure, or somberly lit the path home for families returning from a funeral. Ms. Lamanna elaborates for us: "Will-o'-the-Wisps — we just call them Wisps — still most often manifest as a soft glowing light, so I suppose you could consider them traditional. As a group, they're probably the trickiest kind of ghost we encounter. These are definitely for professionals only." No need to tell our readers twice, Ms. Lamanna. Dipping into our files, we find nothing about hidden treasures or funerary lighting, but we do find plenty of people fooled — sometimes fatally. Mrs. Alanna Curlee of Fayetteville, Arkansas tragically lost a child when the neighborhood children, playing flashlight tag after dark, were led into the sights of deer poachers. Hugh St. Thomas of Bay Head, New Jersey wrote in with the story of his eight-year-old son who became convinced that a ghost was his lost twin, when he was in fact an only child. Disturbed by changes in the child's demeanor, the St. Thomas family moved away and got their son the help he needed to recover from this emotional trauma. Pressed for a pop culture reference, Ms. Lamanna was nonplussed. "The Shining had some manipulative ghosts in it, which would fit the Wisp stereotype. But the book is more appropriate than the movie, I think. Movies are a visual medium, of course, and Wisps work with words — they cajole and persuade, they don't produce elaborate illusions. But when they can convince their victim to see and feel as they direct, it's the same effect for that one unfortunate person." Yikes. Don't go investigating strange lights without a buddy.

IS YOUR CHILD BEHAVING STRANGELY

It could be the work of a Will-o'-the-Wisp!

Can your
Horosocpe
Predict What
Kind of Ghost
You Will
Become?

Ask Madame Lisa and see!



The last broad category of ghosts is perhaps the most viscerally terrifying: Those spirits capable of invading and controlling a living person's body. The movie What Lies Beneath, in which the ghost of a man's deceased lover possesses the body of his wife, used this phenomenon to great effect. Mr. Clayton Rough of Salisbury, North Carolina, wrote about a ghost that possessed his body and made him dig deep holes over much of his two acres of land. Mrs. Liza Cobey of Miami, Florida, wrote a letter to The Scrutinizer while under the influence of a ghost who claimed to be the late Ms. Erika Singler, who had vanished under mysterious circumstances. With The Scrutinizer's help, the important details of Ms. Singler's disappearance were brought to the attention of the police who then retrieved Ms. Singler's body and personal effects for her family.

Of course, you might not have seen a ghost at all. You might have seen an Orpheus Group agent! It is possible, acknowledges our contact, and growing more likely as Orpheus graduates more trainees into field work every month. If you are a psychically sensitive individual in a major metropolitan area and detect a presence in a public area, congratulations! You may have seen one of Orpheus' intrepid agents at work.

What are the differences between Orpheus agents and ghosts? Why, the agents are alive, of course! They simply leave their bodies behind through one of Orpheus' top-secret, patented methods. "It makes perfect sense that our agents are so similar to ghosts," says Ms. Lamanna, our new "in" at Orpheus. "Without getting into the science of it, people's souls are pretty much the same whether inside or outside of their bodies. We call the process of leaving the body "projecting," a term I'm sure your readers are familiar with. Our agents haven't had to go through the process of death, of course, so you'll never see death marks on an agent. And they know they can always reclaim their bodies. But that's an attitude difference more than anything else," Ms. Lamanna laughs. "The benefits package helps the attitude, too. But to get back to your question, yes, our agents can replicate almost all the abilities of the ghosts found in your files, and do some things even better," Ms. Lamanna said. "Agents can drift through walls and walk around unseen. Now I want to reassure all your readers who are frightened by that prospect. Orpheus Group agents



Could this be...

... an
Orpheus
Agent?
They look
just like
ghosts,
only
they're still
alive!

BEJMEEN

Merld

absolutely obey all trespassing and privacy laws. They will only come in your house or on your property, with or without their bodies, if you invite them in as part of an investigation. If that isn't comforting enough, let me show you my daytimer." Ms. Lamanna pulls a scheduling book from her trim leather bag and flips it open. It is positively jammed with engagements and to-dos. "And technically, I'm on vacation!" Ms. Lamanna laughs. "I can assure you that agents simply do not have the time to amble through people's bedrooms."

What is it that projecting agents can do better than the spooks themselves? "This may sound funny," says Ms. Lamanna, "but we can see people — dead or alive — better than they can. Many ghosts are so wrapped up in themselves and the remnants of their lives that they don't perceive the world around them clearly. It's not just that they're distracted; they're completely incapable of seeing past their shells. Our agents never have that problem. And it isn't just something we do when we're projecting, either," Ms. Lamanna adds. "If a ghost walked through that wall right now, I'd see him plain as day, but he might not notice us at all." We feel safer already!

"Let's get back to what agents can do," Ms. Lamanna continues. "What I can do is, after all, part of the reason I'm here. Orpheus prefers its agents keep a low profile. I've heard some really wild conspiracy theories, but the real reasons are very simple: agents must be able to do their jobs without attracting a crowd, either of ghosts or living people. Now, I was involved in a high-profile operation in Miami, my hometown. There was a three-day standoff with a gunman who had two young children hostage. Now ordinarily," she pauses, "Orpheus does not get involved in law enforcement situations. But I was in the area, and the whole city feared for those two little kids. I volunteered, HQ okayed it, and the police chief cleared me to go in. When negotiations fell apart, I was already in the room. I managed to disarm the gunman before he harmed his hostages." She leans forward and raps on the table with an impish grin. "Yes, I'm a Poltergeist." Ms. Lamanna brushes aside any tributes to her heroism. "Being able to help

people is why I love my job," she says. "Once local media got hold of the story, obviously my 'low-profile' was shot. I miss working in the field," Ms. Lamanna muses, "but Orpheus comes up with plenty of ways to keep me busy."

ways we can help people, and society," Ms. Lamanna gushes. "Our R&D teams are partnered with university robotics programs to develop chassis with manipulating arms for our Haunters to control, so that they can move around safely in dangerous environments. They could, for example, clean up a toxic spill, or explore the ocean floor, at absolutely no risk to human life! And of course, our Haunters are the best home security system around — especially if you're worried about keeping out ghosts." To say that Ms. Lamanna is passionate about this subject is an understatement; she continues with barely a pause to breathe. "Keeping a hostile ghost out is only a short term worry thanks to our Banshee agents. There is absolutely no one better," she asserts, "at talking down an angry, scared ghost, and helping that ghost along into the afterlife, than a trained Orpheus professional." Does this sound like the kind of job you'd love to have? Where do we sign up? "Well, to be honest, you can't," says Ms. Lamanna. "There are very specific requirements for becoming an agent. If you've got what it takes, an Orpheus recruiter will approach you." Seeing our crestfallen looks, Ms. Lamanna hastens to add, "But not everyone who works for Orpheus is an agent. We always have openings for qualified people in medical and technical fields, and psychic sensitivity is a definite plus," she grins. "So many Orpheus employees are so happy working there, because for years no one believed they could see or hear things that others couldn't. Well, we believe you. And," Ms. Lamanna winks, "we can test you. Open positions are updated weekly on our website!" Any room for paranormal journalists at Orpheus? Ms. Lamanna raises her eyebrows in mock indignation. "They've got me!" And we're glad to have you too, Ms. Lamanna.

INTRODUCTION

This is the real world. The ghosts are coming up through the cracks in the ground, dancing behind the windows at night, sitting in your attic and playing cards, weeping by their gravestones, following their murderers and planning bloody mayhem, dealing drugs in the back streets and forming cults to try to unearth what truly lies beyond them, just as they in turn lie beyond death.

And they are all around you....

This is the real world. You're an agent for a mysterious group that may have a shadowy history but who won't admit it. You and your team can cast off your physical bodies — or already have done so — and walk through walls, take over people, scream down houses. But if the body dies, so do you. You've been given missions, important, dangerous missions that have you working with (or against) the rich and famous, saving lives, banishing ghosts, expanding the frontiers of human knowledge by determining what really happens after death. Sounds good, doesn't it? Sounds like the sort of thing that ought to be front page news. It is.

This is the real world. Trust Orpheus, but trust nobody else. There are other organizations out there who aren't as ethical as you are, and who want to control the living by using the powers of the dead. There are ghosts being twisted into creatures of malice and pain. There are living people creating tormented ghosts through cruelty, or malice or simple ignorance. There are people who want to use you. There are people who want to kill you. For real.

This is the real world. This is the only world you get, living or dead. Better make the most of it.

In **Orpheus**, the characters are the heroes of their very own ghost yarn. This isn't one of those stories where there's another side, however, or where happy ghosts come back from Heaven to provide counseling for their ex-wives and depressed children. This is a tale where ghosts walk side by side with living human beings, unseen and unheard, possibly benign, often malignant. This is a story where human beings are tearing back the veils from death, uncovering the secrets of what comes next, and discovering strange new abilities in the process.

This is a story of pride, of ambition and of temptation. The characters have all nearly died more than once. How long can they continue avoiding it? They belong to an agency with private agendas and concerns, and they are constantly sent on dangerous missions. Legality is apparently a thing of the past to people with their abilities and connections. They're special agents, sent on some missions too important and too dangerous to tell the rest of the world about. They're able to separate spirit from body—indeed, some already have—and can affect other people or things purely through willpower.

At the same time, there's a darker side to all this rampant heroism and power. Their new abilities came through venturing to the very edge of death — and who knows what else may come back with them? Look at the other ghosts haunting the world. How many of them are sane? How many of them are safe? And you are one of them. It's a pity, but there it is. It may take a while for the crucible to realize it, but they're displaying the same powers as ghosts, they've gone through a kind of death to separate body and spirit, and they must now undergo the same dangers.

Yet, they are still human, and this is still a story about the living world. Characters can't escape into some sort of secret society, or find another reality in which to hide. This world is their problem; they must deal with it or face the consequences. Ghosts are apparently a part of the real world, even if nobody realized it before. The characters just didn't know it. How many times did they walk past ghosts in the past without realizing it? Will they ever be able to visit an old building again, or see a site where a murder took place, without wondering if a ghost haunts the spot? This is the end of innocence, but also the beginning of conscious investigation. Knowledge once acquired cannot be unlearned; you can't stuff the genie back in the bottle, and ghosts won't simply go away. This is the point in the horror movie where the characters have their equipment, know how to use it and believe they can handle the situation.

Of course, since this is a horror story, it isn't that easy.

Orpheus itself is still trying to research the whole question of ghosts, their powers, the afterlife and anything else tied to these great mysteries. Orpheus doesn't know it all, and it's certainly not confessing how little it understands to the agents. Nor does Orpheus care to share the details of its history, or how it will happily hire out its agents for criminal missions, or...

The keynote here is an eventual paranoia, when the characters slowly realize just how great a morass of ignorance they're floundering in.

There's also the gradual perception, by the characters, and by Orpheus itself, that there are other people out there. There are the other agencies like Orpheus, manufacturing their own agents, and who are also selling their services — though, perhaps, not quite as legally or morally as Orpheus. And that's quite a condemnation in itself, given that Orpheus is secretly willing to contract agents for jobs such as theft, persecution to the point of insanity, spying or even murder. There's pigment, and nobody knows quite what's going on there yet; only that it's the symptom of some greater problem. Finally, there are those agendas Orpheus pursued before the characters joined.

In a horror story, realization comes by degrees, and each new step of revelation is another turn of the screw. The characters start the story as the heroes approaching

everything from a position of strength, confident in their abilities, tougher than the average victim on the street and sure that they can handle the matter. It's slowly beaten into them, step by dreadful step, that things are not right, that their strength may not be enough, that there's more out there than they know about, and, most of all, that if they don't resolve the situation, the Bad Thing will happen.

So what are the objectives for Orpheus' heroes? They have abilities, the contacts and the backup (or so they hope), plus the knowledge of what's happening. Most of all, they're operating in the real world, where ghosts are ultimately people who once were living — and who can therefore be understood — and where physical laws can explain what's transpiring, though many of those physical laws remain undiscovered. (Really. After all, Orpheus manages to help the agents detach themselves from their bodies via drugs and cryogenics, don't they? All perfectly scientific, all perfectly explainable.)

The horror begins when ignorance shows around the edges. How does the crucible explain Spectres when they encounter them? Why do some ghosts exist while others don't? What's actually in the drugs Orpheus gives them? In the purest and most paranoid form of the question, what's really going on?

The vertiginous drop of far too many questions and no definite answers opens before the crucible at this point. It's the fear when Mulder and Scully in the X-Files bump up against the actions of the Conspiracy and know there's something going on in the darkness, but not what. It's the terror in Aliens when the Marines — the well-armed, competent, confident Marines—are initially devastated by the aliens in the dark. It doesn't have to be terror, yet, but it's the dread of realizing there may be prices for what the characters have gained.

It's about the fear of death. The crucible has supposedly surmounted death—their souls are now independent of their bodies and they can set aside the physical meat if necessary. Perhaps, however, this is only a temporary accommodation; after all, what happens to ghosts or projected entities when they are permanently destroyed? What rumored greater abyss awaits? The characters have faced down death more than once before; does this make it easier to reconcile themselves to the prospect of dying, or rather, does it make it even more frightening to risk their lives? We hang on all the more desperately to what we have almost lost. Could it be that these close brushes with death will make the characters that much more eager to stay alive? And if this is the case, how will they deal with the ghosts that are here with them in the real world?

ELEMENTS OF THE WORLD

— Orpheus introductory briefing pamphlet

Information inside Orpheus is on a need-to-know basis. As agents working for this organization, you're already on a higher grade than 99.99% of the regular population. Don't get confused by what you'll hear about secret agencies, the undead and life-or-death missions. The scientific equipment and methodology that enables you to carry out your new employment is non-disclosed, but other than that it's very simple. We've hired you to do a job. You get paid for that job.

THE CHARACTERS

Date: Thur

Subject: Orpheus grp.

- > It's not a military operation. From what I've read, Orpheus operatives all > suffered multiple near-death experiences, hence the increased number of
- > military and law enforcement personnel. Some are "normal" people who Orpheus > trained to project their spirits from their bodies. Others are quasi-ghosts
- > whose bodies are in deep trance and under high-level medical care somewhere. I > also heard that some operatives are actually dead, and don't have a body to go

Actually Styxxx, Orpheus denies any ghosts working in-house... not that I believe them. Still, I don't blame people for applying to Orpheus. They pay damn well, and everyone can use the money - for themselves, or for someone or something they care about. Secondly, you got to admit we all have an interest (professional or otherwise) in the afterlife, or in ghosts, or in the supernatural. Hell, some of us believe Orpheus can help us develop abilities we always suspected existed (Right Paisley2K ;) Thirdly, figure that if you're a ghost, and Orpheus offered to train you, or to take care of your living families, you'd be all up on that. Orpheus provides a great many things; money, influence, training, power... hell, I'd sell anyone out for those opportunities.

Jacks-R-Wild

- Orpheus-related thread found on afterlifers.com

ORPHEUS

Lines:

X−Admin:news@a-wol.com

From: "KD" (undisclosed address)

Newsgroups: alt.orpheus

Date: 20 No. 2002 02.55.25 6MT

KD Wrote:

>>> Hey,

>>> here's the daily offerings of Orpheus related topics I could find for today. The first batch is a private email exchange on >>> the Orpheus fileserver, from KD to MW. You'd think those two fucknuts would know to take their conversations else-

>>> where by now...

>>> Orpheus. Love it or hate it, it's the center of the world for us now. They're our employer and our benefactor, and if we screw >>> up on a mission, they're the people who will be very, very disappointed with us. Yeah, it looks like they hold all the cards. >>> They helped my crucible awaken its abilities, and they may — note I say may — be able to take them away. They're the

>>> source of most of the information we get in the briefings about ghosts and the supernatural. But what I'm asking

is, how >>> >>> much do we actually know about Orpheus?

>>> Remember the cover story we got at first? "The Orpheus Group is a private association that wishes to explore death and >>> what lies beyond it. All human beings have potential that they never use. By investigating and instigating near-death experi->>> ences, we hope to awaken this potential in subjects, and learn more about the human condition in the process."

>>> — KD

MW wrote:

>> I don't know how they hooked you, KD. I've heard from my crucible, and from other people, that they

>> recruit through at least a half dozen different methods. Maybe it was a local professor in parapsy-

>> chology who put you in contact with an organization investigating the afterlife, or a firm researching >> reactions to stress that wanted to run some tests on a subject who'd nearly died in the line of work, >> or a newspaper advert asking for people who'd suffered near-death experiences. It probably looked just a shade dubious to you, at first; it did to me. Either it was overly idealistic and doomed to failure, or >> just a set of tests to add to some government database. There was money linked to most of the

>> approaches that the rest of my crucible got; a hundred dollars or so for a quick case history and a

>> few simple physiological checks. Money for old rope. It looked just like any other organization with >> more cash than sense.

>>- MW

KD Wrote:

> Why the hell should we have thought it was real?

> — KD

Me again,

I pulled this second batch from an anonymous posting on alt.orpheus. And let me say, I personally want to cap Chris Carter for popularizing all this conspiracy "X-Files" bullshit that everyone's jacking off to these days. Next, they'll claim we're part of the Illumination or whatever the hell that pyramid thingie is.

And why don't we ever read anything from actual employees of Orpheus on this group? Could it possibly be that Orpheus doesn't want them talking? Now that they're enmeshed in its coils, what do they know? Orpheus has access to drugs that help employees achieve the trance state that allows projection — not that anyone's received the formula to analyze. Orpheus has money behind it. Big money. Orpheus has potential connections high up in the police and possibly the NSA, the FBI or the CIA, given some of the things we've heard on this group. Orpheus has connections with organized crime. A lot of people owe Orpheus favors. It's been three years now, and have we had anything reliable from any sources inside Orpheus? Well, have we?

Orpheus doesn't want to discuss its possible employers, or how it finds some clients, or who pays the bills, or where the money goes, or what the drugs are, or what some of the missions are about. Orpheus probably pays its people very well to keep

their attention on the job and away from any little organizational anomalies. I'm sure that the operatives listen to common sense — and to their wallets — and keep their worries to themselves. Right? Right. No problem.

Types of Agent

— Pending Approval: Curriculum 3.2 in Lesson Plan for New Recruits

Orpheus has several different types of agents who can operate on the "extranormal" level. They come in four basic types: Sleepers and skimmers (**projectors**), and spirits and hues (**ghosts**). Projectors are still alive, but manage to detach spirit from body. Ghosts are dead, but this hasn't stopped them. Orpheus assigns agents to tasks appropriate to their abilities.

Orpheus divides its projector agents into different categories, depending on their method of separating spirit from body. There are skimmers and there are sleepers, both of whom can move free of the body, but under different circumstances.

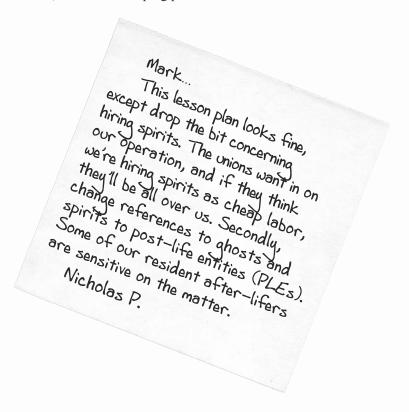
A **skimmer** initially uses a combination of drugs and meditation techniques incorporating Kundalini yoga. This allows them to temporarily project as spooks, and to interact with other ghosts. After a few months of training, skimmers can project without using drugs, employing only yogic techniques to leave their bodies. Most skimmers adapt well enough to project in a matter of seconds.

A **sleeper**, on the other hand, is an agent whose physical body has been flatlined. We here at Orpheus keep a sleeper's body in a state of cryogenic suspension, with the help of embalming cocktails and further drugs, which prevents it from undergoing necrosis. This means most sleepers exist as spirits for extended "tours," so to speak.

When it comes to ghosts, the difference between spirits and hues is fairly unremarkable, and often goes unnoticed. What differentiates hues from a normal spirit is that they took pigment during their life.

Spirits are just that, the spirits of the departed. They may be sleepers or skimmers who died in the line of duty and now exist as spirits, or they may be blips, drones or other ghosts who joined a crucible and managed to develop their abilities to the extent that they're now comparable with other Orpheus agents. Of course, they're dead, which cuts down on the post-mission parties, but we like to feel that we offer our spirit operatives other incentives to make up for this.

Hues, from the studies conducted on this type of ghost, are people who used pigment during their life and now return as ghosts under circumstances similar to spirits. They also underwent multiple NDEs during life, which differentiates them from your average pigment-user. Our scientists have nicknamed them "hues" because they seem to possess less vitality than spirits or projectors. They do have an unusual ability to manifest the physical alterations known as Stains, however, without developing permanent deformations.



Types of Ghosts

— Pending Approval: Curriculum 3.3 in Lesson Plan for New Recruits

Here at Orpheus, we've established that our operatives' powers — or Horrors, as our employees have started calling them — seem to fall into five main types, and that these types often correspond to particular kinds of personality. While this isn't exhaustive, it's a convenient way for us to discuss matters, and we'll be using the following terminology here on in.

- Banshees can croon and either wake or quiet emotions in others or scream loud enough to bring down buildings. Some of them can also foretell the future or examine the past, like the traditional Banshees that foretold deaths. They are frequently insightful, empathic types, but this doesn't necessarily mean they'll excuse sloppy or dangerous behavior.
- **Haunters** can take over physical structures like cars, telephones, buildings mirroring popular fiction like *Christine*, *The Shining*, or *The Amityville Horror*. People with this type of power are generally adaptable, settling into new places or new jobs very easily. They are also often drifters, never totally committing themselves to a position or place though we hope that you'll be staying with Orpheus for a while yet!
- **Poltergeists** have powers involving throwing and manipulating objects, from sewing needles to trashcans to chairs, hence the traditional name. They're often frustrated, angry types, though some can control their anger for a very long time before releasing it.
- **Skinriders** can manipulate people, or outright possess them and force them into whatever actions they consider necessary. Not surprisingly, these people are often leaders, managers or alpha wolf personality types.
- Wisps (or Will-o'-the-Wisps, for the pedantic) seem capable of charming others into following them, and "jumping" between locations in a manner resembling the traditional "teleport." They tend to be magnetic, fascinating personalities, with natures that compel attention... the life of the party. They're also often tricksters and jokers, which may require adjustments inside a crucible.

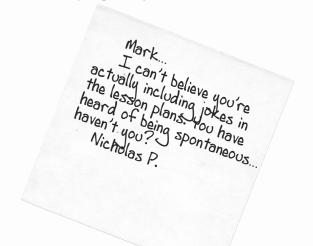
Crucibles

—Pending Approval: Curriculum 3.4 in Lesson Plan for New Recruits

A crucible initially forms as a team assigned by Orpheus to work together. Each team member complements the others, and all of them must work in tandem. Orpheus psychologists carefully assemble the group, choosing the members based on personalities as well as paranormal powers, to produce an effective, functioning team of agents. Of course, there may occasionally be emergencies when Orpheus needs a particular set of talents for an important mission at short notice (or when a particular agent loses his team from attrition or due to general complaint), and is assigned elsewhere.

After a time of working together, a crucible can learn how to use their powers in tandem, and to share vitality. This frequently creates strong connections inside the crucible. The more Orpheus operatives work on sharing this link, the better their talents work in proximity to each other. An effective crucible is far more than the sum of its parts.





Recorded Orpheus Lecture Transcript: Crucibles B onds

Good afternoon. Many of you know me as Agent Darewell — well, now you can start calling me Ilona, because you'll soon be my co-workers and not my students. It's pretty obvious you've all learned to project and to manifest. If those of you still drifting around could finish solidifying, we'll get down to business.

Great. Now, I also know that you've been learning to use your Horrors. Yes, it seems like a silly term in here, inside these clean white walls and under this soothing fluorescent light. Trust me, the name makes more sense once you've been out in the field and ghosts are using Horrors on you. The most important thing you haven't learned yet is how you can use your powers to help a member of your crucible, enhancing and strengthening the Horror he or she is using. Yes, this is in large part because you haven't been assigned to crucibles yet. Those assignments will be coming soon. But for now, listen and learn.

A crucible is the unit of projectors and ghosts you'll be working with, but you already knew that. Think of them as your team and soon to be family. It's unavoidable, so get used to it. Crucible members can share vitality, which we already talked about, but that sharing also develops a strong bond between you and your teammates. What sort of bond? Heh, you have no idea. The bond isn't some mind-control thing, but it does allow you to understand your teammates and how they plan on using their Horrors. It's the exact same thing that happens with military units when they each have a role and know exactly how their buddy's going to respond. Exactly the same here. When someone is about to use their power, you automatically have a way of helping them out, increasing their effect, or the range, duration, whatever. It's all part of an effective crucible.

Everyone, this is Ted Verge, a member of my crucible. He's kindly volunteered to assist me in this demonstration. Everybody say, "Hi, Ted." Now, Ted is going to use the basic Poltergeist power to toss these cans at the ceiling will be using the Inhabit technique to put a time delay on his Horror, allowing both of us to get out from underneath the resulting shower of aluminum. Watch what we do; you should be able to see the powers combine and take effect. Ready? One, two, three.

There, did you catch that? Now, dodging a bunch of empty cans isn't particularly useful, but I'm sure all of you are smart enough to see some of the other possibilities. Working together, you and your crucible can make your Horrors last longer, hit harder, cut cleaner. When you get yourselves into a real jam, you'll get out together, or not at all.

Now, did you notice anything else about how that worked? It looks pretty intimate, doesn't it? Now watch this carefully. Ted, hit me with a little juice. Aww yeah, you always do that so nice. Now I see that some of you look shocked — some of you even looked away. My life

energy, Teds life energy, all melded together, ebbing and flowing back and forth. It doesn't get much more intimate than that. It's the kind of close bond you've probably only ever had with a lover. I like to say that the experience is about right in the middle between an intense mutual orgasm, and finishing a complex jigsaw puzzle together.

Some of you are laughing. And some of you are panicking — I can see your thoughts right now, "But I don't even like most of these people!" Start looking for good qualities in everybody, because once you're assigned to a crucible, your lives are in each others hands. Skimmers, get used to giving yourselves away, and sleepers, get used to taking it. You'll need to constantly monitor your well-being to keep your crucible in peak operating condition, and to keep each other alive.

That's all for today. Spend tonight getting very comfortable with the idea of sharing — crucible assignments will be distributed tomorrow.



REQUEST

For Christ's sake, Andy, will you get me an intelligent Banshee skimmer for this team? I need someone I can trust to handle themselves when dealing with civilians, and who won't blow the team's cover half the time by trashing a police car in public. We only just avoided the last incident hitting the newsgroups. Screw the psych evals, just get me someone who can walk and chew gum at the same time. — CG

MISSIONS

KD s at it again, though I m not sure who he s talking to. I pulled this private email from the Orpheus fileserver, but the email destination is a routing site. We may be looking at a breach of contract here. I ll keep an eye on the situation until I can gather more evidence.

Orpheus expects to get its money's worth out of us. Big surprise there. They'll assign you to missions "suited to your abilities." If the jobs involve heavy interactions with people who are actually still *alive*, they put at least a couple of skimmers on the team. What your crucible can do and how well it can do it determines what sort of missions you receive, but there are some jobs that everyone gets sooner or later.

We skimmers generally get the more mundane jobs. While we're capable of interacting with the everyday world more easily than sleepers, we need to care for our bodies, and we can't just leave the "meat" lying round where somebody might damage it. (See if anyone else in your crucible's heard about the sushi incident at that restaurant. Painful and embarrassing.) We get jobs like putting a wife in contact with her dead husband who hid the bank account numbers, letting orphans talk to their parents so they can have a sense of closure, or driving spooks from a location. Orpheus also sends us in to research and locate particular ghosts, and "prep" them for contact.

Sleepers, from what I've seen, handle the situations requiring a more "delicate" touch — which often means illegal. Yes, I know it, you know it, we all know it, so lets save the whole morality issue for later and get down to basics. They may receive assignments such as stealing research from one consortium on behalf of another, or haunting someone for a year, or eliminating "troublesome" ghosts. Of course, Orpheus has custody of the sleepers' bodies, which helps ensure what our mission statements call "the two-way bond of trust" between the Orpheus Group and its operatives.

Agents who happen to be ghosts get similar assignments to sleepers, though they're rarely assigned alone; Orpheus prefers at least one sleeper or skimmer to accompany them, to maintain contact. Since Orpheus has far more skimmers and sleepers than it does ghosts, this rule hasn't presented any problems so far.

-Inter-office Orpheus memo

One of the hottest drugs to hit the streets is pigment, also known as black heroin, a chic new high seeing widespread usage among the casual drug crowd like ravers and college students. Pigment is a hallucinogenic, and addictive — but it's cheap, which outweighs health problems for most users. Naturally this excites a rush of comments from political, medical, and moral authorities, just as the appearance of Ecstasy did when it first arrived. Depending on whom you ask, pigment is a danger to the youth of the nation, a threat just like any other addictive hallucinogenic drug, or the coolest thing since Napster.

What's worrying me is that supposedly, pigment users can see ghosts - though they normally dismiss this as part of the drugs hallucinogenic effects. I've even heard from a couple of agents that pigment users might be able to project.

Again, none of this is confirmed yet. Nobody in the higher echelons is prepared to give any sort of explanation for this, but I've noticed all reports involving pigment usage are being copied to the labs and to our bosses, so it looks like they're taking an interest. From what I can see, they're using every opportunity to analyze samples of pigment, and pigment users. Do your sources know anything about this?

PUBLIC OPINION — Inter-office Orpheus memo, CG to SL

"I've never heard anything so ridiculous," says Mrs. Amy Peterson of Detroit. "Everyone knows that the dearly departed are always around us, beaming good feelings directly from Heaven to support us in our everyday life. All this nonsense is just that, nonsense. They're in a better, happier world now, and it's un-Christian o suggest anything else."

Mrs. Peterson went on to explain her nos about those who disagree with

Let's be practical here. However much we keep matters under wraps, and however hard the government maintains its silence, people are noticing things. Increased "paranormal phenomena" or simply "manifestations of the supernatural" are growing in frequency. Pigment is becoming more common on the streets. Strange late-night broadcasts are alarming stay-at-homes who just want a quiet evening with some beer and an action movie. Of course, not everyone has the same idea of what's happening (or what to do about it), and even fewer people have any inkling of the truth Orpheus shields from them.

For the sake of public morale and general sanity, this is a good, good thing. Imagine the panic if the average man in the street knew what ghosts could do to him, or that Spectres exist, or the capabilities of our agents.

DEAD AMONG US CONTINUED FROM P.23

"Of course ghosts exist. If they are given proper respect, they will intercede for us with the higher powers. When I am dead, my children will make the proper offerings to my ghost. Thus the will of Heaven is enacted on Earth." Mr. Genjou took a drag from his cigarette. "Of course some of them get annoyed at times. They're people. They're family. Isn't that where you get most murders?"

This doesn't mean the public sees the Orpheus Group with any particular suspicion. People generally give us the same degree of belief as Nigerian bank email scams, televangelists and used car salesmen. If anything, the regular primetime broadcasts means the public is *more* likely to see us as a shameless attempt to cash in on current beliefs, albeit a popular attempt with the same following as trashy daytime talk shows. I never thought I'd be grateful for the cynicism of the American Public, but I am.

Little Brittany never thought that one day she'd see a ghost. Today, she knows they really exist. "I was so scared," she told us, hugging her puppy Sandy. "He looked at me and the others, and then silvery strings came out of his fingers and picked up all the apples and threw them at us. We ran away, we were so scared. Mommy says there aren't any ghosts, but there are, aren't there?" The Scrutinizer can only say that yes, there are. Turn to page 10 for a discussion with our expert, Dr. Janice Tallister, on the latest astrological portents and why this means that more ghosts are coming back....

The newspapers exploit any supernatural incidents in the classic ways. Serious papers ignore the whole topic, or write it up as public hysteria, with occasional columns by psychologists or sociologists about the recent wave of "ghost sightings." Tabloids and Sunday magazines publish double-page spreads with blurred photographs, eyewitness accounts and testimony from "experts in the occult." They do realize, however, that they need something better than this to maintain public

interest and sell more papers, so they're looking for evidence. Any Orpheus members who talk too loudly near a reporter will probably find themselves hounded for a statement. Hopefully the screenings and briefings should teach our operatives not to be this stupid, but we both know people are morons. This also increases the probability that really far-out commentary will actually reach publication, rather than simply being thrown out when it hits the editor's desk. That story about "The Virgin Mary Possessed My Telephone and Ran Up My Phone Bill" might get through, while the Haunter who inspired it had better hope that the photo of her isn't recognizable.

Television, on the other hand, seized on the whole question of ghosts and the supernatural like flies on honey. You've probably already seen some of the new television programs springing up to discuss, debate or profit from the issue. The Networks are already working on formats for reality TV shows set in haunted houses. Any of our compromised operatives, known to investigate paranormal issues, could receive an invitation to join a panel on a new program concerning poltergeist activity. Equally, the pigment question has been seized on by the more perceptive modern youth shows, and episodes involving look-alike drugs are scheduled to air in several popular teenage series. I'm sure they'll have such an impact.

"Say no to drugs?
What a joke," Mary-Clarke said.
"One pill won't be that bad, and besides, Dom gave it to me, and he is sooo cute, and he's on the football team, so he wouldn't take something that was bad for him, would he?"

Orpheus keeps internal matters very quiet, and demands discretion from their clients. Many comply, the fear being: If Orpheus took the ghosts away, they can bring them back. Generally, however, the people who have the money to employ Orpheus also have the sense to stay quiet, if only because their involvement in the matter is embarrassing. The clients whom we take on for research purposes (and who haven't the cash or power to actually know who they're dealing with) are dealt with through several layers of secrecy. We leave them under the impression our operatives are members of the FBI,

or students of the paranormal, or represent the Seventh Chakra Buddhist Wave and want to investigate their building's Feng Shui, or similar such cover stories. If Orpheus can conduct their research without the client even knowing it happened, all the better.

Today we're running a special debate on the orpheus phenomenon. On my right here is Professor Desthenes, noted parapsychologist, and author of the self-help book Working with Your Inner spirit. On my left is Ms. Deborah Robinson, who works as a professional grief counselor and ghost debunker. I'm sure you've all seen the television advertisements for the orpheus Group, and what they purport to offer. I hope that today we'll be able to bring a new perspective to the issue, with the help of some experts and personal testimony.

Of course, things do leak out. We don't mind being public to an extent, given that we're advertising our services on prime-time television, but there are things leaking round the edges, true and untrue, that might be awkward in the future. Rumors of a new clandestine government agency focusing on the supernatural pervade the Internet, and short-circuit the X-Files fan groups with new and far more interesting topics. Conspiracy theory magazines lap up this sort of garbage, stymied only by a shortage of evidence, but willing to connect ghost stories with mysterious Men in Black and provide a suitably paranoid explanation. Theorists explain pigment through theories that the government is testing a new combat or docility drug on the inner cities. This sort of thing muddies the waters when it comes to our genuine work — but, as I said earlier, it's in the nature of human beings to be morons, right?

But for the rest of the world — for all the quote normal people — life hasn't changed. Certainly, some claim to have seen ghosts, but people always say that. People die from drugs, or have strange hallucinations. That's normal, too. There may be a statistically significant

rise in the number of incidents reported to the police, or in the newspapers, or mentioned on television, but it's not quite enough... yet. The tide is rising, however. Three movies starring heroic ghost-hunters are in the works at Tinsel Town. Feng Shui book sales are up. More psychics are earning columns in the newspapers. The more dramatic churches are gaining parishioners. The average person is learning how to spell *houngan* and *omyouji* properly.

For the moment, though, things are under control. The tide hasn't risen quite far enough yet.

INTERNET ABUZZ

— Inter-office Orpheus memo, CG to SL

The internet reaches a broader section of the populace than ever before: grandmothers have email appliances, school kids have wireless access, housewives tune out soap operas in favor of the do-it-yourself drama of chat rooms. Bad news for any hardcore, just-the-facts geek looking for a place to hide from the Orpheus Group media juggernaut — the internet is awash in ghost stories. Shady psychics offer their services through spam mailings; websites piece fuzzy photographs, public records and dumpster diving treasures into profiles of supposed Orpheus agents; even a recent devastating virus, the Deadboy worm, is rumored to be the posthumous work of a deceased Russian hacker. Of course, internet basics remain unchanged no matter what fad topics come or go: there's a lot of hype and misinformation out there, but you can dig up some interesting information if you know where to look and what to ask.

Welcome to GhostWatchers.orgline Your Site for Supernatural Advice Welcome New Member, What Would You

Like To Do?

Kandy47 (10:47:32 PST): Hi, my name is Candy and I need some help. I have a ghost in my apartment and it s really scaring me. I got the Scrutinizer s ghost issue cause I thought it d tell me what to do, but it just says call Orpheus or a church but I don t have that kind of money and I don t go to church. I just work as a barista. I think it is a polterghost because

it throws stuff. What should I do??

Greysaint (10:52:45 PST): Hi Candy. If you haven t read that rag yet, throw it away. If you already have, burn it. Remember back in the 90 s, when everybody was writing about angels? Angels cured my dog s cancer, angels saved my baby after I forgot her in the hot car, angels helped me catch that ball? And everyone had angel pins and angel stationery and angel posters. Well, now it s ghosts and projectors, and it s the same people who actually read that Scrutinizer piece of shit. And it s a Poltergeist. Check out our FAQ here for some information without the rose-colored glasses.

Fastext (10:53:02 PST): And if you tell us what it s doing we can probably help you more.

Anthor (10:54:22 PST): Anything would help more than the Scrutinizer.

Fastext (10:56:43 PST): I never touch it. What s in it?

Greysaint (10:57:58 PST): A little bit of really basic info, a few pieces of fluff on Orpheus and a whole lot of nothing about things that are really scary. They claim to have a consultant from Orpheus now.

Fastext (11:00:34 PST): How the hell did that happen?

Anthor (11:01:29 PST): It s that chick, the one that killed the guy who took those kids hostage in Miami. Hang on, I ve got it somewhere here. Lamanna. She says the cops cleared her to go in, but if she s been reduced to writing for a tabloid, I bet she got her chops busted pretty hard.

Greysaint (11:03:02 PST): She killed him? I thought she just shot him with his own gun.

Anthor (11:04:12 PST): That s what I heard, that and the fact he never walked out of the hospital. You won t often hear me expressing sympathy for an Orpheus employee, but I can t say I d relish her current job. I have no doubt she s got to shepherd every single piece of that tripe the Scrutinizer wants to publish past somebody at Orpheus. Finding the common ground between mass stupidity and rampant corporate greed. Hey, Candy, what s going on with your Poltergeist?

Forum Topics Thread Reply

Kandy47 (11:05:34 PST): Uh, I think it s mostly just throwing magazines on the floor. But I have some candles and they keep falling over too.

Fastext (11:06:23 PST): Okay, first, put the candles out. Ghost or not, you don't need a fire. Second, and this may sound stupid, close all your doors and windows, then make sure you don t have any stray animals in the house. A stray cat can be really sneaky and cause a whole lot of damage.

Kandy47 (11:06:59 PST): Okay, I Il go check.

Fastext (11:07:30 PST): Anything else funny in that magazine, guys?

Anthor (11:08:21 PST): I found the part where she claimed Orpheus agents never snoop around where they re not supposed to really funny.

Greysaint (11:08:52 PST): Now you ve done it, Fastext.

Anthor (11:09:46 PST): Come on. They re a private corporation (supposedly) with employees who can walk around completely invisible and stick their noses anywhere. Notice she never admits their agents can jump into people s bodies, just like Skinriders. She never says anything about their Banshees predicting the future, which we all know they can. She barely mentions Wisps, because what they re good for is screwing people over. They walk through walls, snooker or take control of people, and they know the future. Why hasn t the government shut them down yet? Because they work for the government. Get used to being watched.

Fastext (11:10:44 PST): Maybe the government has their own spooks to keep an eye on things.

Anthor (11:11:15 PST): Like that makes it any better.

Kandy47 (11:11:21 PST): Oh god oh god. When I came back to the computer the picture of me and my family was knocked over and I picked it up and there was bright red lipstick smeared all over my head. On the picture I mean. And then the glass just cracked right in my hands and I m really scared!!!

Greysaint (11:12:03 PST): Okay, Candy. Calm down. Can you see it? Did you maybe catch a glimpse of it in the glass before it broke?

Kandy47 (11:12:41 PST): No. No. What am I looking for??

Greysaint (11:12:58 PST): Well, if it s a Poltergeist, it could just look like a bunch of floating junk. Or it could look like the person who died, if it puts enough effort into it. That Il usually mean it s pretty irate. When they get really mad, you can tell they drip blood, or their head lolls at an angle, or they have big nasty teeth. If you see something like that, leave your house, and don t even bother telling us you re going. Just go.

Forum Topics Thread Reply

Anthor (11:13:55PST): And that sanother thing. Those articles say a ghost might look like it died, but they never mention that an agent might look scary enough to kill you.

Fastext (11:15:01 PST): You just lost me again. Anthor (11:15:52 PST): Just because they haven t died doesn t mean they can t have big rotting holes in their psyches. That s what causes those horrible manifestations. It s not death, it s seriously nasty personality problems. Ibet they ve got those in spades.

Anthor (11:17:04 PST): I bet they have dead employees, too. Much lighter on the payroll.

Greysaint (11:20:06 PST): Candy? Helloooooo? **Fastext** (11:22:09 PST): Aren they all technically dead? I thought I heard the secret entrance requirements were that they killed you and brought you back.

Anthor (11:22:49 PST): You ve got me there, Fasty. Hold on, let me jot that down.

Greysaint (11:24:41 PST): There s lots of ways to get close to death without actually dying. Like sleeping through your alarm, missing your plane, and the plane crashes and burns. Or almost rolling your SUV into traffic. Or, you could die and be resuscitated. That'd be just like on Buffy.

Anthor (11:25:12PST): I mgoing to ignore that last bit.

Kandy47 (11:24:50 PST): I think I see something. I can only see it if I don t turn around to look. It s dark, and it looks shaped like a person. It's flickering like a candle shadow, but I put all the candles out when you told me to.

Greysaint (11:25:11 PST): Get your keys and leave the apartment now, Candy. Don t come back until morning, and don t come back alone.

Fastext (11:25:46 PST): What do you think it is, Grey?

Greysaint(11:26:22PST): Idon tknow, but I venever heard anything good about pitch-black ghosts. Maybe it s just kind of smoky or dirty, but why take the chance?

Anthor (11:26:55 PST): I ve got to go with GS here. I ve got some pretty nasty stories logged on the shadowy types.

Fastext(11:28:15PST): Why aren they in the FAQ? **Anthor** (11:28:48 PST): Because nobody asks about them frequently.

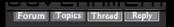
Greysaint (11:32:13 PST): Well, I wonder if she left. **Kandy47** (11:34:20 PST): Candy is no more. She will no longer bother you with her inane prattle.

Anthor (11:35:22 PST): That s charming, troll. Hope you had fun, asshole.

Fastext (11:36:45 PST): You know we get set up like this every few weeks.

Greysaint (11:37:34 PST): I don t know. I ve got a bad feeling about this.

Anthor (11:38:40 PST): That s because you re a sucker.



LEGALITY

—Private email on Orpheus fileserver, KD to MW

I'm scared. I'm plenty scared.

Certainly the American government hasn't taken any official stance on Orpheus' activities, and so far any "projecting" operations in other countries have been extremely discreet. Equally, the government hasn't published any laws about the treatment of ghosts, made any public admission that ghosts might exist, or even sponsored any public studies that might remotely parallel Orpheus' lines of research. Some of the more "black ops" missions that Orpheus sends us on, however, deal with matters that would interest the government very much indeed; spying, assassination, theft....

There are two possible conclusions that we can draw from this. Either the US government is completely unsure of how to handle what's happening (though certain people inside it might be more aware... shouldn't they?) or Orpheus is already in the pocket of a major part of the government. Either way, drawing the government's attention right now would probably be a bad idea. It's also fair to assume that the governments of other countries would be very, very interested indeed in Orpheus-related information and research, don't you think? Perhaps they may even have similar projects of their own up and running.

As to the legality of certain Orpheus missions, that's resolved simply enough.

Don't get caught.

Have you really thought about the *implications* of all this?

RELIGION AND THE AFTERLIFE

Inter-office Orpheus memo, CG to KE

Ghosts don't appear to conform to the commandments of any known religion, and our department's certainly been doing plenty of cross-checking. Theologians have made inroads (both legal and illegal) in libraries across the world, and while this helps Orpheus



assemble an excellent reference section, nobody's yet pieced together any coherent link between the current behavior of ghosts and the strictures of faith. Some of our more esoteric researchers go so far as to trace their source materials back to Indo-European creation myths, while others investigate modern cults, trying to find links.

While studying modern religion, we can see an upswing in modern small-scale cults dealing with death and the afterlife, often spawning around particular recent hauntings. As a side note, Orpheus agents later disposed of these hauntings, but that doesn't necessarily kill the cult in question.

Curiously, mainstream religion doesn't yet seem to correlate any rising figures on ghostly activity, or to be calling out any secret corps of exorcists, which is helpful for us. The number of people attending church (or mosque, or temple) may have risen slightly, but not enough to do more than make the relevant priest grateful for an increased faith in his area, and certainly not enough to pay for a new church roof. Orpheus wants matters to stay that way; they aren't interested in a general religious revival that might interfere with their work. If one starts up, then Orpheus would probably have to stop it, in case

they contribute to a religious or spiritual movement. Which would be awkward, wouldn't it?

THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

Orpheus and its few notable competitors have the ghost phenomenon pretty well wrapped up, but now that the cat's out of the bag, there's little to stop the curious from poking the sack to see what else might be in there. More than a few universities are scrambling to put together parapsychology departments funded by eccentric — and aging — alumni (leaving their administrators with the daunting task of determining what, exactly, are the appropriate credentials for the new hires). Amateur researchers abound, from those who have hunted ghosts for years, to those who migrated from other fringe disciplines (UFO chasers, purveyors of "therapeutic" copper jewelry, etc.) in hopes of finally cashing a little recognition or cash. Get this. I even received an email from some clown who wanted to know if we had contact information for Miskatonic University. Orpheus has done nothing to slow the growth of this fledgling ghost industry — at least not publicly. Our patents, which I have to say we watch over with an unblinking eye, guard our business interests; but we can't simply sit back and scoop up talented individuals as they float to the top. We have to find them before our competitors do.

BRPHEUS

Dan,
The prognosticators blew
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Royal University

Marcie,

Prepare patent applications for the items described in Appendices B. C. D. items described in Appendices B. C. D. F and G for the University's Patent and Licensing Committee meeting next week. Forward a copy of the suicide week. Forward a copy of the suicide note to Legal. but be sure to leave it out of the patent forms.

TO EVERY ONE AT THE UNIVERSITY WHO PISSED ME OFF-

WHEN YOU FIND THIS NOTE, I WILL BE DEAD.

FOR A LONG TIME, I THOUGHT about KILLING ALL of you instead. Coming to campus with a gan and a silencer, creeping down the halls of the lab to pick gon off one by ore, leaving your pathetic freshman conducting your blard, roke studies to struggle to figure out in whether it's real or just part of a fucked up PSYCH EXPERIMENT.

THE DEGREE 1907 INTO MY RESERCH, THE MORE I REALIZED WHAT A BAD I Idea that would be.

LIFE IS SHORT.

DEATH IS FOREVER.

EVERY DAY YOU STILL DRAW BREATH, I WILL BE GATHELING POWER. ON THE DAY YOU DIE YOU WILL BE SORRY FOR EVERY THING YOU EVER DID TO ME, BECAUSE I WILL BE THERE WAITING FOR YOU. I'VE LEFT MY FINISHED WORK HERE FOR YOU. SO YOU LINDERSTAND THESE ARENT EMPTY THREATS. ENJOY WHATS LEFT OF YOUR LIFE.

DEATH IS GONNA BE HELL.

Damy

The Wave-Particle Nature of Ghostly Emanations and Manifestations

by Darryl G. Marchand

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science. Introduction:

Many members of the global fraternity of scientists reacted with shock and dismay to the introduction of plausible, reproducible evidence of the existence of ghosts. Even now, as the evidence mounts past what any reasonable person would consider conclusive, these so-called men of science cannot see the new vista of exploration and experimentation that has been opened before them instead, they devote all their energy to futile attempts to disprove and discredit the truth that has come to light, like the men of learning who forced Galileo to recant the theory of heliocentricity on his knees. Consequently, there are few resources available to those bold individuals like myself who would prefer to look toward the future of science. The tools and methodologies I used to conduct my research were developed by me, with little to no assistance from my department or advisors. The methodologies are detailed in the appropriate sections full schematics are included in the appendices for the tools and electronic devices I created, so that others can reproduce and hopefully expand upon my work.

In the sections, that follow I will provide hypotheses and preliminary equations concerning the interaction of ghosts with the phenomenal world (the ghosts themselves most often belonging solely to the noumenal world, their existence independent of sensory observation, but as we will shortly address, this is an alterable state). The central hypothesis, upon which I have based all others, is that ghosts are composed of energy, which has as its natural state a wave pattern. Because the wavelength of this energy is not within the visible spectrum, ghosts in their natural state are invisible because the energy has an extremely narrow interaction cross-section with physical matter, they are practically intangible (precisely calibrated measuring devices can be constructed based on either the detection of patterns of interference with light waves of known frequency, or the minute vibration of certain substances within the applicable cross-section, as seen in Appendices

C and F, but both devices are unreliable outside a controlled experimental setting).

It is exciting enough that consciousness is arguably present in this wave-form creature. It is even more thrilling to demonstrate, as I believe that I have herein, that the ghost is capable of altering its resonant frequency at will, transforming itself into a phenomenal being (accessible to the senses) capable of interacting on a physical level with the world as perceived by man. Hereinafter, a phenomenal ghost will also be referred to as a "particle-form" ghost, as the ghost ceases to behave as energy does — it can no longer pass through solid matter, for instance. It takes on a

more particle-like nature.

Ascertaining the precise type of energy composing a ghost's being, and the origin of that energy, is outside the scope of this thesis. A particle-form ghost's expenditure of energy can be measured using standard methods while it interacts with physical matter, but it is at this point impossible to determine whether a ghost in wave-form is expending energy at all. The energy-matter conversion process should not cause energy loss in itself, but achieving the appropriate conditions for the conversion might well require energy expenditure. In man, even thought requires energy, with electrical charges racing across the brain's synapses set loose from the ties of matter, is a ghost's thought process free of any price, a perpetual machine of thought? And if not, how does it acquire the energy to perpetuate itself? As fascinating as these topics are, they are best examined in conjunction with experimenters from the field of cognitive science. I do not doubt that further research on this topic will not only change physics by requiring the introduction of new particles and wave-states to our theories, but will shake the very foundations of Psychology and Philosophy.

As fascinating as a ghost's inherent dual nature is, they demonstrate abilities far beyond that which allows them to control their own matter-energy conversion. A ghost can move physical objects without exerting physical force on them, whether in phenomenal or noumenal form: I theorize that this is accomplished by adjusting the ghost's energy wavelength to create constructively harmonic vibrations within the matter (see equations 2.6-2.10). A ghost in either form can create light or sound without a physical or chemical source: I theorize that these are additional, and separate, forms of harmonic induction, producing respectively photons or phonons (a transformation that in effect requires an energy expenditure since the photons or phonons are irreclaimable through matter-energy conversion, and are in any case emitted to produce the necessary effect of light or sound) (see the entirety of chapter 3). Ghosts appear to release matter and energy along somewhat predictable lines: my observations of these phenomena suggest that ghosts may be constrained by quantum restrictions. It may be possible that ghostly energy can be emitted only in heretofore unknown quanta which correspond to specific phenomenal experiences.

Many ghosts appear to take quantum mechanical observer-observed relationships far beyond the point typically reached in scientific studies. Modern quantum mechanics suggests that the act

of observing an object in an indeterminate state resolves that object into a (mostly) measurable state — that is to say, the observer himself directly impacts the observed.

Many ghosts turn this around: the indeterminate energy that composes them seems to have a direct effect on the psyche of an observer. The detailed descriptions I present in chapter I, below, provide more detail, but the noumenal energy of a ghost allows it to alter human consciousness directly.

Because I have extremely limited observational data on projectors (such as Orpheus Group agents), any extrapolation I might make from the nature and abilities of ghosts to that of projectors would be pure conjecture. I harbor great ambivalence toward Orpheus: they have advanced science by unimagined leaps and bounds, yet they shun the research community that would build on those advances to reach even loftier goals. It is a sad day for science when it is easier to get a ghost to participate in an experiment than a living, breathing fellow scientist.

Further excerpt: from Chapter One

...As mentioned previously, the phenomenal and psychological effects of ghostly energy appear to follow a few channels. My hypothesis (detailed below) is that higher-level quantum effects force this ghostly energy to manifest itself only along certain lines. It may be the case that higher-order macroscopic events obey something like Pauli's Exclusion Principle, preventing certain pairs of events from happening simultaneously, or that a particular packet of ghostly energy resonates in human experience in such a way as to cause particular effects.

In an ideal world, ghosts (or Orpheus Group projectors) could be induced to emit their energies in a tightly controlled laboratory environment, but to date that has not been possible. As a result, a phenomenological survey of ghost energy effects is all that remains. The phenomena fall into four primary spheres: Those pertaining to the ghost's movement and personal nature those allowing for material effects those resonating in the living psyche and the energy's use

in manipulating others' use of the same energy.

• Coherent Ghostly Movement: Ghosts' ability to revert to an indeterminate energy state allows them to pass through ordinary matter, as described elsewhere. It also allows for a phenomenon I tentatively name "Partnerless Quantum Coupling," wherein some ghosts can traverse a great distance without interacting with intervening matter. Even in physical form, ghosts do not appear to be affected by gravity or electromagnetism. As mentioned elsewhere, however, they do occasionally resonate with nearby matter, and when the ghost is at a high energy state, it may affect local electromagnetic fields.

• Material Effects: Most ghosts have the ability to convert part of their substance into "hard" matter or into electromagnetic radiation. Nearly all ghostly radiation occurs in the visible part of the spectrum (roughly 4,000 to 7,000 angstroms), and many ghosts can create complex images from them. A few ghosts (see Appendix A, "Turner, Martin") radiate at high enough energy

levels to burn living persons and things nearby when they manifest.

• Psychological Resonance: This category is by far the most complex. The same, heretofore unknown, mechanism that allows consciousness to persist after the demise of the physical organs responsible for sustaining it somehow gives that persistent consciousness (grounded into its noumenal energy state) a "hook" that allows it to manipulate the nervous systems of other creatures. Several repeatable phenomena have been reported, both by reliable and unreliable witnesses. These include reports of "ghost writing," wherein a ghost takes over part of a living person's body and causes him to write or type messages strong emotions caused by the proximity of a ghost (including previously unknown love for a certain person, or the desire to kill a particular individual) and the ghost's apparent presence in the experimenter's dreams.

The author has experienced this last sensation (the repeated and consistent presence of a ghost in dreams) and subsequent interaction with ghosts suggests that the ghostly presence in

the author's dreams is itself real.

In interviews (see Appendix A, "Stern, Karl," et al), ghosts indicate that others seem to vanish when they enter into a living person's dream, which itself indicates that the other ghosts' noumenal state somehow enters a static superposition with the dreamer's body. This will require further investigation, preferably as quickly as possible, as the ghost's continued presence in my

own unconscious is neither welcome nor conducive to good rest.

• Metamanipulation: Much as a living human might use a simple machine such as an inclined plane or pulley, ghosts' intuitive understanding of the energy that composes them allows them to change or aid another ghost's activity. Most often, ghosts use this ability as a force multiplier (as a living person might use a lever): They apply a specific amount of their own energy in a particular direction at the proper moment, and cause another ghost's energy manipulation to be much more effective. This "metamanipulation" appears to work across most of the noumenal spectrum, though it is certainly the case that not every ghost knows how to improve every other ghost's phenomenal activities.

OPPOSITION

— Leaflet pinned to wall in Orpheus toilets

Listen to me very carefully, I will say this only once. It would be easier to ask about the people who don't want to interfere with you guys. The answer to that is simple: Your the people who don't want to interfere with you guys. The answer to that is simple: Your the people who don't want to interfere with you guys. The answer to that is simple: Your the people who don't want to interfere with you guys. The answer to that is simple: Your active clients and your employers, dear Orpheus. (Unless matters change, of course, and active clients and your employers, dear Orpheus.)

liability all the time.)

While not everyone is automatically your enemy, most people have some opinion while not everyone is automatically your enemy, most people have some opinions are about your work according to how they perceive reality, and many of those opinions are

Spectres object to most Orpheus-directed missions. Rival groups are competitors for Spectres object to most Orpheus-directed missions. Rival groups are competitors for resources or clients, or have diametrically opposed objectives. Pigment suppliers want to stop you from investigating their operations. Government groups will object to crucibles spying on classified material, or feel you simply know too much. Religions of crucibles spying on classified material, or feel you simply know too much. Religions of crucibles spying on classified material, or feel you simply know too much. Religions of crucibles spying on classified material, and Judaism, and from Islam to Voudoun and all flavors, from Christian to Taoist and Judaism, and from Islam to Voudoun and Scientologist, all have some particular belief about the afterlife. Vigorous adherents may feel morally obliged to interfere with you, whether this involves leaflets through the mail, public denunciations or actual force.

the mail, public denunciations or actual force.

Normal people will probably just fear you if they discover how thin the veil between them and ghosts is, and with good reason. What if they feel the best way to resolve this to stop people like you from investigating and interfering? It's a valid point of view. It might even be true....

THE OVERT ENEMY

— Private email on Orpheus fileserver, KD to Unknown Parties.

From: KD

To: <Undisclosed Recipient>

Subject: Re: Enemy

Some enemies are easy to spot; Orpheus knows them well enough that they go on the briefing sheets, or obvious enough that a crucible figures out they're dangerous, or public enough that anyone with the sense to read the newspaper is watching for them.

Spectres (at least, that's what some of us call them, though nobody knows where the name came from; our beloved leaders refer to them as hostile PLEs) are a clear and well-recognized threat. Initially, several crucibles report active interference by hostile ghosts who weren't connected with the current mission and had no clear identifying traits. In fact, they were carrying so many Stains it was almost impossible to identify them as once-human (their personalities weren't particularly normal, either).

Well, since then, we've identified a couple "breeds" based on shared traits, but otherwise we can't distinguish the new ones from the really pissed-off spooks. Admittedly Spectres carry more Stains, more attitude and far less of the warm and cuddly, but so far Orpheus hasn't established much policy in the way of dealing with them except for "fight or flee." As such, all our bosses can do is provide warnings, hope for the best and request more data, if your crucible ends up in a "research-oriented" situation.

Of course, it's only reasonable to suppose that Spectres want to "research" us when we encounter them. Presumably they don't know any more about us than we do about them. I'm guessing here, but they may see us as threats to eliminate or interlopers to watch and evaluate. I don't know. They don't seem capable of speech.

Other than Spectres are "normal" ghosts and accidental projectors that a crucible may encounter during an assignment. These are often the most probable reason for an assignment, and may or may not be hostile. Whether they're actively opposing you or not depends on a crucible's behavior and the mission's focus. Of course, some ghosts will be hostile; if a Haunter is busy lurking in his old mansion and doing his best to kill everyone who comes in, he probably won't make an exception for an Orpheus crucible. Let's be real here.

Other overt enemies include agencies with their own projectors and their own objectives, like Terrel & Squib and NextWorld. Sometimes we're good about steering clear of someone else's operations, but there are times we find ourselves working opposite one another because two different parties called us in. Someone hires our crucible to arrange an accident for a political candidate, for example, but what happens when you find a Banshee projector tripping the *other* candidate, who falls down the stairs and breaks his leg in a fit of terror? If my crucible's supposed to obtain privileged data on a crime boss' Swiss bank accounts, how are we supposed to react if he's already hired "protection" capable of taking us on? This is the kind of crap we have to deal with or put a little forethought into every mission.

Finally, with publicity about ghosts growing, I can foresee another potential enemy emerging. The more the public knows about ghosts, projectors, the supernatural and other associated problems, the more frightened they become. Terrified people may react in unpredictable and wholesale fashion against *everything* associated with ghosts. Even those people trying to fight them....

THE HIDDEN ENEMY

— Inter-office Orpheus memo, CG to BB

There are enemies out there we either suspect exist or won't even know anything about until they appear. Regardless, you can almost trace the process of discovery on a graph; read some of the post-mission reports, or listen to the debriefings, and watch a few extra lines of cynicism develop. To salve your bleeding conscience, it's not as if we could tell the crucibles about them. If the operatives are lucky — and intelligent — they'll notice what's happening around them, and put two and two together. If not, well, let's hope they can survive a few more NDEs.

As far as internal threats, we're lucky that our operatives trust us. If they don't, I hope you'll report anyone vocalizing their distrust. We can't afford disloyalty here, but we aren't the government either. Let's not get heavy-fisted. We can handle discontent with an increase in wages, a few benefits or a quiet word in the office.

Again, however, be careful. I trust both of us to approach the problem with some tact. I suspect that others in the chain of command will treat employee dissatisfaction like pebbles that could start an avalanche. They will head it off — one way or another. Oh, and bear in mind that if a crucible actually refuses to undertake a potentially criminal operation, then praise their moral standards and claim it was simply a test of their ethics.

There, done.

Be aware that our directors are currently worried; they learned some very important lessons from everything that happened before Project: Echo. They need to be absolutely certain of their agents' loyalties.

TROUBLE ON THE JOB

— Orpheus briefing notes

A crucible in the process of carrying out missions can expect several potential obstacles. First, if aggrieved or malicious ghosts are responsible for the current situation, they will not sit back and allow someone to "deal with them." The confrontation may involve active combat or the use of calming powers and psychoanalysis, but if the crucible wants to dispose of a ghost issue, then they must deal with it one way or another. It's unlikely to leave of its own accord. If it did, then ask why? Has it gone else where, away from interfering Orpheus agents, to indulge its baser passions or to simply brood and mourn? Was it really working for someone else, and just testing the crucible to establish their capabilities? Has it vowed vengeance and gone looking for the ways and means to obtain it? These are all important questions that every crucible should remember and consider.

The local living population may also pose its own problems. In most situations, the location's owner or proprietor hires us to handle the situation, but usually with instructions to conduct the investigation discreetly because of tenants, office-workers or employees.

Cases where our operatives can liaise freely and openly with other people on the premises, or intimately connected with the situation, are likely few and far between. It's more probable that the crucible must invent plausible reasons for their presence, or "go in" while projecting. Orpheus operatives should not have to deal with security guards or police, however, because we are there legally by invitation of the property owner.

If caught on the premises by someone who is not aware of your purpose, please use discretion. Telling a wife that her dead husband's ghost is haunting

his workplace is asking for trouble. Who knows how she'll react to such news? Will she run over there at once, screaming for contact? Will she have a nervous breakdown on the spot, and try to commit suicide to join him? Will she decide the crucible is an obstacle to her continued married felicity, even if he's dead and she isn't, and try to dispose of them in some way? It's a difficult situation, and we still can't provide a full set of policies and procedures about how to handle the living in such cases. If your crucible makes a mess and causes a disturbance, deal with the matter as best you can, but leave the talking to our competent spin doctors. As far as Orpheus policy is concerned, however, we shouldn't have to clean up after you.

There is also the question of outside interference, from other agencies or organizations with an interest in the matter, or from people with a personal stake in the crucible. We have, in the past, had cases where other agencies were be diametrically opposed to or in conflict with our aims — such as, "get the Swiss Bank codes from the ghost and make sure nobody else has them." It's easy for our operatives to grow used to walking through walls, tearing down buildings and possessing people when nobody else can do it. It becomes an entirely different kettle of fish when your opponents are equally capable, and may even be better at it than you are. In such cases, the crucible should take precautions (if not already doing so) like hiding their identities while on the job, in case other agencies try tracking you down to recruit or remove you. Fortunately, in such cases, Orpheus protects its own agents, and can arrange changes of identity and location, fake deaths, alter records and generally provide for useful agents that have been compromised.

BISHOP

Nobody admits they know about Bishop, and if they do, they whisper his name with conspiratorial trepidation. Orpheus Group has no records pertaining to Bishop, and most are genuinely ignorant of his identity. The fact remains, there's a ghost or projector out there called Bishop. He's powerful and strong, and reputedly only two people have survived a confrontation with him... barely... and they ain't talking about it. Trainers use his name as a warning for vigilance and spooks treat him as a ghost story for ghosts. Bishop, however, is a shadow who knows enough spook tricks to remain hidden and survive. Some even say, he's tenacious enough to be older than three years, the expected expiration date all ghosts carry before fading from the world completely.

Orpheus agents have occasionally made personal enemies of other agencies, who then take the initiative by interfering with the crucible's missions. A lone government agent fixated on conspiracies may use your team as evidence that the *Truth Is Out There*, and make a nuisance of himself by investigating you. This becomes even more problematic to you and your colleagues if someone dangerous accesses his files. More lethal enemies, like a lone Spectre, a ghost your crucible failed to eliminate or psychic investigators and religious fundamentalists who believe the crucible in the service of diabolic powers, may prove persistent and dangerous antagonists.

PURPOSE

— Private email on Orpheus fileserver, Unknown Parties to KD.

So what purpose do agents have? And what purpose, ultimately, does Orpheus have?

300 YAC 3HT

— Private emails on Orpheus fileserver, KD to Unknown Parties.

Work for us depends on the jobs Orpheus has available. And they're far more likely to over-commit than to allow agents to sit round doing nothing. A crucible may receive more than one assignment at once — God knows mine has — particularly if their talents are useful in different places at the same time. If one task involves exorcising ghosts who only appear after night in a particular warehouse, while another requires contact with an elderly scholar during the afternoon to examine certain books, then there's no reason why the crucible can't handle both simultaneously. And, of course, rack up twice the pay.

The sort of services Orpheus Group offers publicly, which you've seen advertised on the television — our "bread and butter" work — are simple enough. Want to reach your deceased parents to tell them you love them one last time, or find out who killed them, or settle a question of paternity? No problem. Is your house haunted? We can handle it. Are you afraid a ghost haunts your recently acquired antique? "Let our team of trained professionals check it out for you."

Orpheus offers security and protection at what it claims are very reasonable prices, but given we invented projecting and have been doing it with the least mishaps, so far, it's a very high price.

Given the number of people willing to pay for these services, however, Orpheus keeps us busy.

Timetable: Kate Dennison

Monday

10:00: Pre-meeting with Mr. and Mrs. Kowalls, to arrange seance with Mr. Kowalls senior that evening.

12:00: Crucible Pot Lunch! Get To Know Your Team!

14:00: Report on research of Megathwarp Toys Factory and Sunday's investigations. 19:00 - 21:00: Séance with Kowalls family.

Tuesday

09:00 - 12:00: Debriefing re: Kowalls séance and briefing for next few days.

13:00 - 15:00: Kundalini yoga session.

15:00 - ?: Investigate Megathwarp Toys Factory and fumigate ghost.

10:00 - 12:00: Medical checkup. Ensure the entire crucible attends.

12:00 - 13:00: Counseling session over lunch with Orpheus psychologist.

16:00 - 18:00: Briefing re: Arcade Antiques Shop.

20:00 - ?: Investigation of Arcade Antiques Shop.

Thursday

00:00 - 24:00: Continued surveillance of Arcade Antiques Shop. Alternate surveillance with Harry's crucible.

09:00 - 11:00: Preliminary report on Arcade Antiques Shop, and decision on whether fumigation is required.



We need to contain this leak now! Find out who's blabbing and deal with them fast. I don't think it's KD, but he's become a liability regardless.

Anonymous posting on alt.orpheus I've got a source inside Orpheus, and he knows what he's talking about. It's not just the sentimental stuff on the television. There are less legal jobs, ones where payment is made quietly and doesn't appear in the account books. Or it takes place via the transfer of unmarked cash in large suitcases, or is measured in favors and opportunities rather than money. Orpheus prefers sleepers for these jobs, since they require invisible, insubstantial and long-term agents in any case, and Orpheus has a very permanent hold on this particular sort of projector. "You do trust us to look after your body, don't you? Of course you do."

Of course, reliable, trustworthy skimmers and ghosts can hope for lucrative assignments like this eventually, once they've proven they're safe beyond any stretch of a doubt. Orpheus is nervous, these days, and it doesn't want to be betrayed. My source says operatives on these less legal assignments will probably only receive one task at a time. This prevents conflicts of interest, or possibly losing said agents when they're in the middle of a delicate and illegal job that only they could handle. These jobs aren't printed on timetables on Orpheus-headed paper, and Orpheus personnel don't discuss them in front of other Orpheus agents who have yet to know this side of Orpheus Group's employment. Orpheus is more likely to issue assignments in brown paper folders with instructions for the agents to destroy after reading, or to leave on site rather than carry along on missions. As to such missions' nature - it may vary wildly, but the keynote is that it's something Orpheus wouldn't advertise they supplied and the buyer couldn't purchase publicly. Need evidence on your cheating husband? Their agents can follow him anytime, anywhere. Want your exwife haunted for a year until she goes insane or kills herself?
Orpheus has people who can do that for you. Interested in obtaining
the results from your rival company's latest line of drug experiments?
No problem; sign here, our agents are very professional. Want to know
where your enemy's bodies are buried... literally? They have people who can put you in touch with the information you want.

IN BETWEEN

— Private email on Orpheus fileserver, KD to Unknown Parties

As matters stand, most of us have a "day job" with Orpheus; while Orpheus doesn't take up every single minute of our free time, we can look forward to frequent missions. Time spent between assignments, as far as Orpheus is concerned, is best spent in self-improvement. A more capable agent, after all, is a better functioning agent — I'm sure I read that in one of those brochures they give us. One of these days I may even read all of mine. On the supernatural side, projectors can work at their yoga while ghosts practice their techniques. On the more practical side, Orpheus arranges classes in most legal studies, and a few more questionable ones like lockpicking, handling explosives, clearing evidence from an area, etc. Practicing the hundred-meter sprint under danger conditions never hurt.

PRIVATE FUNCTIONS

— Private email on Orpheus fileserver, KD to Unknown Parties

We all have private reasons for joining Orpheus. Few of us sign up for drugs, meditation, multiple near-death experiences, and constant peril of life and soul purely for the large salary... well, okay, that helps. The few in it for the money quickly find work in the black ops section, where the salary is commensurate with their dreams; a lack of personal desire or philosophy must be very useful to them there.

So why do any of us join Orpheus and dedicate ourselves to exploring the nature of ghosts? Let me indulge in pop psychology and give you a list of vaguely defined reasons. Feel free to guess which mine was. I'm feeling masochistic.

The Personal: Someone the operative knew died, and the operative wants to know more. Maybe it was a friend, or relative, or lover — or maybe even an enemy. Maybe they died when they shouldn't have, caught in a car crash by accident, or fell downstairs, or something similarly petty or stupid. Perhaps they died and forever left something unsaid or unsettled between them and the agent. In any case, the agent's personal motives center on his emotional tie to this dead person. Maybe he wants to communicate with her, or maybe even bring her back as a ghost, to work at Orpheus with him. On a higher level, he might just want a fundamental answer from the universe about why she died and he didn't.

The Curious: Aren't you? Curiosity about what really goes on with life, death, the universe, and everything else motivates the agent. She just wants to know, and Orpheus offers her the means to find out. All the answers are there, if she's prepared to dedicate the time and effort to research. Curious agents rarely have quite the depth of passion that drives those who have lost loved ones, or which fuels a deeply held moral or religious conviction. Still, curiosity can push an inquisitive agent a long way. The degree of common sense, though, varies. (Incidentally, the sort of person who is curious enough to undergo near-death experiences and hazardous experiments is also the sort of person who will be very, very interested in what's happening at Orpheus. Like you.)

The Altruistic: To some people, Orpheus offers a literal godsend, the chance to ease the pain of suffering ghosts, or to provide solace and help to the living. Ethically, how can anyone refuse such an opportunity? Altruistic operatives risk danger and death to fulfill their missions for Orpheus, and sometimes even while off-duty too. This sort of person is probably not going to suspect Orpheus of anything dubious, whatever you tell them, and will be horrified by some of the "black ops" missions undertaken. Terribly nice people, most of them, but the world isn't a terribly nice place.

The Moral/Philosophical: A strong religious, moral or philosophical set of beliefs drives this operative. Maybe he wants to find the "Truth" so he can share it, or stop other people from believing in falsehoods any longer. Maybe he feels a deep need to uncover what lies beyond death. Perhaps she wants to confirm her personal beliefs, or deconstruct those of others. Maybe she just wants to contact divine authority so she can present her complaints in person. A dubious group, as you can see.

The Thrill-Seeker: Idiots... generally. Sorry. Some enthusiasts believe this the greatest thing since bungee-jumping. Oh, the excitement of piercing death's veils. Oh, the thrill of walking among the poor unsuspecting civilians as a ghost, as a secret agent, as (dare I say it) a superhero who's mislaid his spandex. While I understand this motivation, it's dangerous for the agent's crucible as a whole; if he lands in trouble, he gets them into trouble too. I had a colleague like this earlier, which I hope explains my prejudice on the subject. He still works for Orpheus, in a different crucible, but let's just say that these days he doesn't have a body, in hibernation or otherwise.

Inter-office Orpheus memo, CG to SL

In my more introspective moments, I have to ask what Orpheus actually wants. Why did they start the whole project, and what do they hope to achieve by it? What's the purpose behind the daily grind of tasks, and will it ever get there? Then, I actually do some work.

Seriously, even if Orpheus started off with wholly admirable motives, dedicated to the advancement of learning, the march of science and the truth of the human condition, that's not what we are anymore. We work for cash. We work for favors. We're like the Internet; we start off as a scientific project, but find out that half the servers are being used for spying and the other half for down-

loading porn.

I've met some scientists and researchers among our colleagues here who hope to achieve something genuine in the way of original discoveries. They really think they can advance the frontier of human ability. Good luck to them, but we're neck-deep in commercialism and crimé and politics now. Even if the cream of our science teams wants to hide their heads in the sand and ignore it, it's not going away. There're also others who see the whole thing as a power play, or who can't get over the whole "greater than normal humanity" thing. And there are the people like you and me, who just joined up to do the job, and who stick with it because the job must be done. We have responsibilities to the crucibles, and to our clients, and somewhere in the middle of that we're barely keeping our heads above water.

Some crucibles are noticing that not all their briefing officers or superiors have the same idea about what Orpheus is, or where it's going. I feel sorry for them. In the end, it just comes down to the same thing you get everywhere else. We started off with high intentions, we had to cope with the real world, and now we're just

trying to make a living off the dead... right?

- Transcript from News Magazine, episode 02-08-28 Who is the Orpheus Group and how have their discoveries changed the world? Mock them or love them, the fact remains that they've made the move from cult fad to mainstream phenomenon. What does this mean for them? And for us? Who else is getting into business beyond the grave? Who makes the grade as an Orpheus agent? And We'll answer these questions and more, tonight on News Magazine... just what does NDE mean?

A GUIDED TOUR OF ORPHEUS GROUP

Introduction

The Orpheus Group is a privately held company specializing in contact with the souls of the recently deceased. The Orpheus Group first swept into the public's attention following the broad collapse of the United States' information economy. Unlike scam artists and local fly-by-night operations, Orpheus Group had measurable, repeatable success in contacting the dead. The group first entered the public spotlight upon recovering a password protecting US\$100M worth of a chemical company's assets after a network engineer suffered a heart attack less than an hour after changing that password. Desperate for a success story, business reporters from all-news television, business magazines and even the Wall Street Journal descended on the Orpheus Group and its charismatic CEO, Jack Tilton, playing them first as a novelty segment. Then, as they dug deeper, Orpheus Group became a true success story and a scientific phenomenon.

Mission Statement

Orpheus Group is a customer-driven, profit-focused company with a unique opportunity to expand into a previously untapped marketplace. We base our activities on a four-point strategy articulated by our CEO, Jack Tilton:

- Our people are our uniquely talented greatest resource.
- Invest only for real returns; this is no carnival.
- Attend to our customers' needs and their loved ones' unfinished business efficiently and professionally.
 - Explore this strange new experience scientifically and carefully.

We take our responsibility to the bereaved and to the recently departed seriously. Every Orpheus Group representative adheres to a strict code of conduct, ensuring our clients receive a respectful and professional experience. You will not find Orpheus Group commercials on late night cable television, nor Orpheus Group sponsorship of sporting events, no matter how large we grow.

Orpheus Group employs some of the world's leading researchers in physics, cosmology, psychiatry and psychology, and periodically consults with religious officials from across the globe. We are the primary sponsor of the upcoming World Conference on the Afterlife in Breda, The Netherlands.

With all that said, we are a nationwide for-profit corporation, not a funeral home. We don't dress our consultants in black suits or play organ music in the offices. Per the second point in our strategy statement, this is no carnival, and it is not a charity. Orpheus Group provides a unique service in the world, and we are the leading corporation in our market space.

History

The Orpheus Group has always been an ambitious organization. Starting from its founding by engineer Bob Jackson and physician Anne Del Greco in 1986, Orpheus Group set out to redefine the way society manages human life and livelihoods.

In those early days, Jackson and Del Greco believed passionately that medical science was on the verge of multiple breakthroughs — the sorts of breakthroughs we see today, with human genetic engineering well along the way to common implementation. Microscopically precise laser surgery allows for previously impossible surgical tasks, and the unlimited promise of stem cell research lays before us. Jackson and Del Greco realized those days were coming and they wanted to provide a unique service: Together, they knew several terminally ill, wealthy individuals who shared the same optimism about medical science.

Jackson and Del Greco undertook their first cryogenics project while moonlighting from their day jobs. Neither could afford devoting their full energies to human cryogenics in those days, and they used their most eager potential client, Jane Kennedy, as something of a guinea pig. Kennedy, only 37, was suffering from several then-untreatable tumors, but she had robust enough personal assets to provide startup funding for Jackson and Del Greco's early activity under the corporate name JDG Cryogenics. Kennedy was also an adherent of Eastern religion, a viewpoint she says prepared her to accept some important experiences that were yet to come.

The Fight Against Leukemia Continues

The Maria Del Greco Pediatric Oncology Center at the University of Chicago celebrates its tenth anniversary this year. The lion's share of the center's funding comes from donations by Orpheus Group board member Anne Del Greco, whose daughter Maria died of leukemia in the mid-1980s. Several fundraising opportunities will take place over the next year, including a charity ball, an auction and

Amazingly, five years after Jane Kennedy became JDG Cryogenics' first customer, surgical techniques advanced to the point where her tumors were no longer inoperable. Del Greco scheduled Kennedy's emergence from cryogenic suspension to occur simultaneously with her laparoscopic surgery, engaging some of the finest oncologists in North America.

Kennedy survived, as you may know, and upon her full recovery became one of JDG Cryogenics' greatest supporters. Less well known is the extent to which Jackson and Del Greco relied on Kennedy's trusts to keep JDG Cryogenics operational. When Kennedy emerged from suspended storage, she found herself the owner of a full 25% of JDG Cryogenics, and saw the great possibility of things to come.

Deep-Throat Phantom: Yeah right! There was no easy way Kennedy could withdraw funding without risking the lives of the half-dozen others still in suspended animation. Jackson and Del Greco strong-armed her into complying, using the guilt of potentially "killing" the others who were still waiting for their miracle to happen.

Forum Topics Thread Reply

Jane Kennedy, as her book *The Other Side?* describes, was more aware of her environment than she expected to be while cryogenically suspended. The flavor of her frozen coma ebbed and flowed over time, and in at least three incidents, she recalls leaving her body and witnessing the world we know as it changed over the five years of her suspended animation. Kennedy saw and interacted with ghosts while "projecting" and also eavesdropped on conversations throughout the city. When she became conscious, she provided convincing evidence of having witnessed these conversations, often providing details that even the original participants had forgotten about.

Jane Kennedy was not the only early patient to emerge and find themselves with an equity stake. Within seven years after JDG Cryogenics' founding, four others emerged from cryogenic suspension with shares of stock in place of the money they expected to have held in trust. This group — including heart disease survivor George Oliver — hardly acted with a single mind, but they now owned more of the company than did Jackson and Del Greco.

Jane Kennedy convinced the rest of the Board that cryogenics alone would not provide a profit center for this company. She was not the only cryosleep subject who experienced strange hallucinations and astral projection while unconscious, and Kennedy, along with Anne Del Greco, was sure that Kennedy's experiences could somehow generate revenue. With a stroke of the pen, JDG Cryogenics became the Orpheus Group in 1994, named for the Greek mythological character who entered the realm of the dead to free his deceased wife, Eurydice, from torment. Orpheus Group launched a broad and deep study of the afterlife, of post-life entities such as those witnessed by more than one Board member while suspended, and of the precise chemical cocktail enabling them to project their consciousness out into the world while metabolically near death.

We would be remiss if we did not mention the interest, even at this early date, that the United States Federal Government took in the Orpheus Group. When issues of national security are at stake, Orpheus Group is front and center in performing its duty to our country. To the early Orpheus Executive Leadership Team's surprise, the National Security Agency and other groups did not demand a shutdown of the company's activities or any similar government interference in the free market process. Instead, the US Government retains a courtesy seat on the Orpheus Group Board of Directors.

From: LyreLiar < lyreliar@go_away.com>
Newsgroups: alt.conspiracy, alt.conspiracy.orpheus, misc.test
Date: 2003-1-17 01:04:15 GMT

crowely wrote:
> Jackson had nothing to do with it, it was all the NSA.

No, that's not correct. Jackson worked with the NSA. Together they discovered that people who had multiple near-death experiences could sometimes reach back into the near-death sensory place and interact with other ghosts. They couldn't find a lot of people, so, as crowely a stutely mentioned elsewhere, they decided to go with prisoners—and this is where the Marion fire fits in.

Orpheus and the NSA drugged a bunch of prisoners and then deliberately and carefully took them back and forth from alive to dead several times in a row. But something went wrong. My sources aren't saying a lot, but apparently a dozen prisoners ended up comatose and nonresponsive. Crowely has it right when he says Jackson didn't have anything to do with the fire—that was all NSA. But Jackson was complicit in the prisoners' deaths anyway.

Then the NSA poisoned Jackson to cover it all up. A shot of about 10 ccs of pure nicotine stopped his heart. The autopsy didn't show anything unusual, because Jackson had always been a chain smoker. Mark my words. This will all come out eventually.

Tragedy struck the Orpheus Group in 1996, with the untimely death of co-founder and Chief Executive Officer Bob Jackson. Jackson, then in his early fifties, suffered a heart attack, leaving the Orpheus Group rudderless and without direction. The days after Bob Jackson's death were difficult for everyone involved with Orpheus Group; for a time it appeared that the lack of new business, combined with new regulatory difficulties with the Food and Drug Administration, might scuttle the company entirely. Chairman of the Board George Oliver stepped in as Acting CEO while the company searched for a new captain of the ship.

George Oliver continued functioning as acting CEO for almost two full years, until the Board authorized the hiring of Jack Tilton, an energetic young executive from the steel industry, to take Orpheus' helm. Tilton immediately changed Orpheus' direction, bringing in talented executives from many industries to fill key management positions.

Tilton also took a leadership role in a previously understated position. Until 1998, Orpheus had kept below the radar in terms of public relations. The company's services were only affordable by the very wealthy, and Orpheus management had previously been ambivalent about the market value of its post-life projection technology. Tilton turned all this around. He undertook a crusade to raise the company's public image, to make its activities clear to anyone who asked, and he directed Orpheus' scientific staff to publish rigorous papers describing the company's activities and hypotheses around post-life technology.

The mainstream science establishment and press heaped skepticism and even scorn on these early publications, but Orpheus Group persisted, and has since issued continued documented proof to major scientific journals. By 2000, at least two other ventures were formed on the basis of Orpheus' theoretical groundings, and we expect that in two years, post-life technology will become its own unique sector of the economy.

In the years since Jack Tilton raised Orpheus Group's visibility, our goal has been to refine post-life technology. Our enterprise for doing so has been Project Echo, the secret process by which we train and prepare extraordinary people to project their consciousness onto a higher plane, where they can sense and interact with ghosts. These people function as our Investigative Consultants, and they help to resolve mysteries and ghostly infestations that no one else can handle.

Orpheus Group has been profitable since 1998 and remains a trailblazer in its market sector. Gartner Group, GIGA and Forrester Research all rate Orpheus Group among the market leaders in whichever industry area they choose to categorize us. For more information about Orpheus Group, or to engage our services, please contact a Customer Service Representative.



THE INNOVATOR PROBLEM

— Inter-office Orpheus memo, SL to CG

PRPHEUS

Re: IP problem
The Executive Leadership Team has long been aware of the so-called Innovator Problem. Companies focusing on a single new technology and leading the way into that technology field invariably find them selves losing market share and strength to more established corporations that have the wherewithal to invest heavily without the promise of immediate

We are, without guestion, an innovator in our field, and although the cryogenics technology remaining from the JDG days still provides some income, we rely heavily on our expertise in post-life entity management. Currently the Innovator Problem is not an issue for us since no large established companies show an interest in moving into our market space. The ELT believes it is not merely possible, but likely, that we ll establish a firm enough footing in this sector to withstand all comers.

About a year ago, Tilton started an initiative he shielded from the Board: He wanted to take Orpheus Group through an Initial Public Offering. He assigned various staffers to prepare the usual documentation and quietly approached a management consulting company about the feasibility of taking the company public. We managed to acquire some of those documents and made them available throughout this report where possible.

As a sidebar, our sources within the company tell us that when the Board of Directors uncovered the work accruing toward an IPO, they put an immediate stop to it. Tilton would have lost his job had he not retained the personal support of several Board members. As it was, Orpheus released a few of the low-level staffers involved in the investigation after forcing them to sign ironclad nondisclosure agreements about what they'd learned, and giving them disproportionately large severance checks.

ORPHEUSFAQ EXCERPT

Q5. What if I know of a public building with a "ghost problem?" Should I inform the owners or contact you directly? What about my child's school?

A5. Orpheus Group cannot begin an investigation without the permission of the building's owner or the tenant in the disturbed area. While you can contact us directly, be aware that such "secondary calls" don't earn the priority that a "primary call" from a tenant or owner receives.

In the case of a school or similar institution, contact Orpheus directly and we will follow up with school officials. The safety of our children is paramount to all of us at Orpheus Group, and we sympathize with any concerns you might have.

STRUCTURE

— Taken from press and promo clippings, as well as from "Welcome to the Orpheus Group," a dossier distributed to new employees.

Two years ago, the Orpheus Group moved into its plush new headquarters in the metropolitan area. Within a short drive of the International Airport, Orpheus' consultants are a three-hour flight from anywhere in the continental United States. Orpheus HQ is a state-of-theart, secure five-story building with high-speed Internet access and a robust emergency medical facility, an underground parking garage and three secure sub-basement levels. The building also hosts a small athletic center for employee use, and a dining room whose staff is led by Chef Rene Mineaux (late of the prestigious Blue Room).

As our mission statement indicates, our uniquely talented employees form the rock on which Orpheus Group's success rests. From the dining room staff through to the executive suite, each member of the Orpheus team knows he is personally involved in the company's success.

INVESTIGATIVE CONSULTING

Our Investigative Consultants form the core of our business. These professionals care for daily Orpheus operations, from ordinary sales calls to direct contact with the recently departed and just about everything in between. Consultants travel across North America in teams of three to six, though we occasionally use larger teams for complex or emergent situations.

A **Project Leader**, who may or may not also serve as project's Lead Investigator, guides each Investigative Consultant team. Orpheus Project Leaders are responsible for tracking individual Consultants' activities, time billing and expense tracking, and similar work. Project Leaders sometimes enter the field, but many work strictly

from Orpheus Group headquarters, remaining in contact with project teams by phone and email.

Lead Investigators head up field project teams; generally their investigative expertise, management experience or strength in communicating with the recently departed provide them with an edge over other Consultants. We expect Lead Investigators and Project Leaders to mentor newer Consultants, providing them with the opportunity for fieldwork that will develop their skills and value to the organization.

Orpheus maintains a dedicated **Training Team** as an adjunct to the Investigative Consulting organization. This group remains separate from field activity and provides expertise and research information to Investigative Consultant teams. The Training team also provides new hires with intensive "boot camp" style regimen to bring them up to speed with Orpheus policies, procedures and technology.

Orpheus Group does not maintain specific standards of schooling, education or experience for its Investigative Consultants. This is unlike nearly every other aspect of our corporation, and it emphasizes the unique positions that Investigative Consultants hold. ICs venture into previously unknown territories, and Orpheus Group is keenly aware that old-economy requirements for such positions have no validity in the modern day.

Our research shows that about 30% of the Investigative Consultants on staff have been repeatedly hospitalized within the last decade. But the hospitalizations don't have a consistent cause. One has a persistent brain tumor that's recently gone into remission; another appears to have been a bouncer and a third is a former Army enlisted man who, from obtained documents, has more lead in him than a box of pencils.

There's no consistent thread among the rest of them — at least nothing we can find on paper. They largely fit the typical demographic of adults in the US: Half men, half women. About 85% finished high school; about a quarter have a bachelor's degree or better. Age distribution also hits demographic averages (more or less), with a quarter of their workforce between 30 and 40, a third under 30 and the rest between 40 and 65. Orpheus maintains six internships

for high school and college students, with admission based not on achievement, but rather essay and personal interview. These people are almost mathematically average. This is unusual.

Orpheus seeks out many of its people directly; they recruit specific individuals. They occasionally put up a table at a local job fair, but there's no obvious pattern to the names that they choose for further interviews. We've seen people from every walk of life given consideration, and very similar individuals turned down for no apparent reason.

The Consulting organization is led by Senior Vice-President Bradford Negley, who joined Orpheus Group relatively recently, after a lengthy management consulting career with Deloitte & Touche.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The Public Affairs organization within Orpheus Group is led by Senior Vice-President Margaret Burns. Margaret Burns comes to Orpheus Group after a long and successful stint at Magadon Pharmaceutical, where she recorded six consecutive quarters of increased positive perception ratings before leaving Magadon to join the Orpheus team.

Public Affairs is split into **Operating Teams** on a media basis. PA has four teams: Print, TV, Radio and New Media, but most PA staffers float from team to team as the need requires. The New Media team works closely with the Information Technology organization, and they are responsible for maintaining the Orpheus Group website.

— Inter-office Orpheus memo, CG to SL

Public Affairs maintains one group of roaming image managers, and many investigative consultant teams keep a PA staffer on-hand to manage the occasional public relations crises that can arise when word gets out that a particular client contracted Orpheus' services. Burns gives these people great latitude to act as required if the PA staffer deems it necessary to cover up some Orpheus activity, that's fine; if the field PA person wants to call a press conference, that's okay too. Burns will intervene before Orpheus' image is too far down the crapper, but she chants the " empowerment" mantra and seems to really believe in it. Her enemies, on the other hand, say that what Burns is really doing is giving her people enough rope with which to hang themselves.

INFORMAL AND MINOR ORGANIZATIONS

With any medium-sized corporation, power and activity don't always reside in the boxes on the organization chart.

Associates' Coffee Club — One of the most quietly influential groups at Orpheus, six executive associates — called "secretaries" back in the day — meet every Friday morning at 6:00 for coffee and pastry at Tim's Bakery, a few blocks from the Orpheus building. There, thinking themselvessafely out of earshot of anyone who might care, they share gossip and horror stories from the office. For the most part, these associates don't share *real* horror stories so much as office-horror stories — "I was on my way out the door at 5:45 and he needed me to take notes for an hour meeting with his senior staff," or other similar tales.

Education Team — Several of the best Investigative Consulting trainers meet informally over lunch a few days a week to discuss new recruits, current events and office politics. This includes Mark Struthwolf and Ilona Darewell, two of Orpheus Group's top trainers. These educators are generally closed-mouthed outside of this circle, and many other trainers are suspicious of their discussions and motives.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Orpheus Group has a small Information Technology organization. We are still a small enough company that extensive implementations of enterprise-scales of tware (like ERP or CRM systems) aren't really necessary. Most of our company-wide applications are custom-built, since no off-the-shelf customer information system is configured to handle the kind of unique information required here at Orpheus Group.

The head of the Information Technology organization is Vice-President Merrick Porter, who has been a part of Orpheus Group since its earliest days.

— Inter-office Orpheus memo, CG to SL

Nobody likes IT. They know it, too, and act like the put-upon martyrs of the company. There is conflict between Porter in IT and Raddicks, the came along, and Porter never got along with Raddicks. Raddicks had ear first. Raddicks has since left, under questionable circumstances. The neering is desktop computers or servers go down they end up at the but there you have it.

As if that weren t enough, the smiling drones of Public Affairs routinely log critical hardware failures because they forgot to turn their computer t have many social skills in the first place, can t really hide their contempt for the PA people; the PA people detest the IT group s lack of social group doing the other a favor.

ČG

Members of the Information Technology team are eligible to participate in field activities as acting Investigative Consultants, since many investigations involve tracking down the recently departed to discover information about sensitive IT systems.

ENGINEERING

Engineering is the heart of the Orpheus Group. Until his untimely demise in 1996, Orpheus Group founder Bob Jackson personally led Engineering — in fact, it was Jackson who perfected the first fully successful cryogenic tank, back when Orpheus Group was JDG Cryogenics.

The head of Engineering is a relative newcomer. Junior Vice President Dr. Enid Farquand has advanced degrees in mechanical engineering and life sciences from the University of Chicago. This is Dr. Farquand's first position in industry after a successful career in academia.

— Inter-office Orpheus memo, CG to SL

Farquand is an idiot. She has academic credentials to beat the band, two Ph.Ds... the whole deal. So she's brilliant. But she's a brilliant idiot. I don't know what moron put her in charge of a department. She has no management skills, and the interpersonal style of your high school's A-V club president. She won't look her subordinates in the eye, ignores her peers and only communicates directly to her supervisor on the Executive Leadership Team. She has no idea how to delegate work; her schedule was thrown to hell the other day because she insisted on fixing a thorny technical problem herself.

By all reports she'd be happier doing just handson work, but the ELT put a lot of credibility into her success in Engineering after Raddicks stormed out, so they shuttle her out to management and leadership seminars all over the country in the hopes that something will stick.

The rest of the Engineering team is responsible for upgrades and maintenance of Orpheus' cryogenic equipment. This is a critical operations function within Orpheus, because modern cryogenics remains an important revenue source and, more importantly, because no lapse in cryogenic suspension of living clients can be tolerated.

When a client is brought out of cryogenic suspension into unconsciousness in preparation for surgical procedures anywhere in the country, one or more Engineering team members accompany the client to ensure his continued safety.

LIFE SCIENCES

Chief Physician Murthy Chandrawati runs the **Life Sciences** department, with a few Vice Presidents reporting directly to him. Life Sciences employs several MDs and

there is always a physician on duty and another on call at Orpheus headquarters in case of a cryogenics crisis.

Chandrawati enjoys the respect of his staff, who praise his management style as "hands-on, with no micromanaging." This contributes to Life Sciences being one of Orpheus Group's most consistently successful and profitable organizations. Life Sciences staff works most closely with Engineering, particularly in the cryogenics area, but LS staff may be called to duty alongside Investigative Consultants. In fact a few LS personnel are permanently assigned as adjunct members of Investigative Consultant teams.

— Inter-office Orpheus memo, CG to SL

Everyone in Life Sciences knows that Chandrawati sleeps with his secretary. Not everyone in Life Sciences knows he also sleeps with at least two RNs on the floor as well. He's a charmer and maintains strong interpersonal relationships of the sort that a man twenty years his junior would. He is very competent, and he knows more about cryogenics than any two of his non-Orpheus colleagues.

ACCOUNTING AND FINANCE

The **Accounting** and **Finance** departments report to different Vice Presidents, but they work closely together; both organizations sit beneath Chief Financial Officer Elizabeth Brandeis in the organizational chart.

— Email found in Mainframe's recycling bin; Source Ref# 2034

"I'm no financial services nerd or anything like that, but these two groups make the whole company go 'round. You need anything done, really, you have to go through Accounting. And Finance reputedly sits on a nest egg the size of Gibraltar.

What nest egg, you ask?
Well, when someone signs up
for the cryogenics process,
one requirement is that Orpheus Group gains limited
power of attorney over the
person's finances. This is
ostensibly to protect the person's assets so they remain

viable when the person returns to a normal metabolic state. Contracts also expressly permit Orpheus to tap interest and dividends beyond the prime lending rate + 1% to provide coverage for ordinary operating expenses, such that the cryogenically frozen individual is never at risk of damage due to Orpheus' inability to maintain them. The money does revert to the client's estate in the event of their demise. Not that the average joe could distinguish between the Project Echo process and death, but there you have it.

"Maybe this ought to be in an independent trust, you might think. Yeah, you would think that. Brandeis put the first few of the agreements through, back in the day, and Orpheus managed to push them on about half of the subsequent clients. The rest renegotiated, providing Orpheus with an operating funds trust and a contingency account and so on.

But what I'm saying is, there's a whole lot of money belonging to frozen people in Orpheus accounts. And Finance has its wang in the tank.

"Another thing... ghosts make fantastic inside traders. Until the SEC's regulations catch up with Orpheus activities, there's nothing technically illegal about sending a ghost to a company's boardroom, soaking up secrets, and returning with the goods. Sure, it might be illegal to send a live consultant projecting his way in, but the dead are immune from prosecution."

Despite Orpheus Group's unusual activities, Accounting and Finance see themselves as oases of relative normalcy. Accounting standards remain as they have always, and the stock markets play out their drama every day without any contact with the departed.

Orpheus regularly asks accountants and financial analysts to join Investigative Consultant teams that need forensic accounting or market research skills.

PEOPLE SERVICES

While other companies have "Human Resource" departments, the Orpheus Group Leadership Team feels that title minimizes the value we place on our employees. The **People Services** organization falls under the helm of Senior Vice-President Nicholas Panagiotatos, who has been a part of Orpheus Group since it grew large enough to need a People Services team.

People Services is generally responsible for managing employee compensation, benefits, incentive compensation plans and retirement funds. Due to the unique nature of Orpheus Group's business, our employees are keenly aware of their need to provide themselves with quality long-term health care, life insurance and retirement benefits; our compensation plans are among the best in any industry to which we are typically compared.

Orpheus Group's People Services also acts as an impartial arbiter on behalf of the Leadership Team in the event of a dispute between two of our business groups. People Services personnel also play facilitators in our Incident Learning Process, which is activated after a project team faces strong negative results.

— Inter-office Orpheus memo, CG to SL

Curiously enough, People Services also manages Internal Security. The unspoken assumption around HQ is that Internal Security has several ghosts on "payroll" — the ghosts' families receive nice stipends, and the ghosts receive whatever else they want, too. Rumors run thick as to what sorts of things the security ghosts ("spook spooks") earn in payment. Free time to possess the living? DVD players?

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Orpheus Group's Executive Leadership Team is a small and focused group of executives who, together, provide more than 125 years of upper management experience at corporations sized similarly to Orpheus Group. Any one of them will happily tell you they've never worked anywhere quite like Orpheus before.

Names and backgrounds of the Executive Leadership Team are provided elsewhere in this document. There is no overlap between the ELT and the Board of Directors; CEO Jack Tilton does not hold a Board seat (despite his personal financial investment in Orpheus' success), and no Board member holds a management role.

The ELT sets policy and strategy for the Orpheus Group as a whole — annual initiatives like cost-cutting measures, strategic partnerships and funding programs all come down from the ELT and are passed along to the various organizations by their individual leader.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Orpheus Group's **Board of Directors** is led by Chairman George Oliver, whose guidance led Orpheus into its recent string of successes. The board has many voting members and holds several non-voting advisory seats as well. Orpheus Group determines membership on the Board of Directors by shareholder vote.

The most publicly visible members of the Board, beyond Chairman Oliver, are members Jane Kennedy — a founding party — and Anne Del Greco, the surviving architect of Orpheus' predecessor company, JDG Cryogenics.

From the Orpheus Group website's Frequently Asked Questions file:

Q23. What is a post-life entity?

A23. A post-life entity or PLE is Orpheus Group's terminology for what others might call a "ghost" or "spirit." It's a dryer, more technical term, we admit, but we think it's more precise.

Q24. Okay, but what is a post-life entity?

A24. It is tempting to say that even Orpheus Group's top researchers just don't know what a post-life entity is, but that would be hedging a bit. It's more factual to say our scientists have several theories. First, it really is possible that a ghost is the soul of a living person who managed to persist beyond the point of the body's demise. Certainly many post-life entities who our researchers communicated with believe that's precisely what they are.

Second, a post-life entity might just be the impression that a person's brain leaves on the local psychic environment. It persists for a few years, then eventually fades on its own. That would help us explain why we don't find very old ghosts beyond three years or so. Sir Isaac Newton doesn't seem to be lurking around King's College.

Beyond those two theories are some ideas that either the layperson probably wouldn't understand, or ideas in left-field to the point of implausibility. Those interested should look at *Spirits in the Material: The Science of the Orpheus Group*, written by Orpheus co-founder Anne Del Greco.

THE BOARD

— Email found in Mainframe's recycling bin; Source Ref# 2034

Oh, boy, the Board. There was no Board of Directors for the first few years of JDG Cryo's history. There didn't need to be one, really; the company hardly had the funds to keep the doors open. But as time progressed, venture funding trickled in and Jackson and Del Greco slowly sold their ownership stake in the company to obtain the capital needed to keep the company solvent. They were careful, keeping things diluted as much as possible, making certain they each kept around 30% of the company's ownership.

Then came the Azim incident. Amir Ja'afar al Azim of Saudi Arabia was cryogenically frozen, but something went horribly wrong. Ja'afar's body wasn't frozen properly and underwent rapid necrosis; a few weeks after going under, he was unsalvageable. To settle al Azim's family's lawsuit, the company sold more shares of stock, enough to dilute Jackson and Del Greco's shares to less than 50%.

The moment that happened, pow, Jackson and Del Greco were extra. Jackson received the CEO position, since the new majority owners had no collective idea how to run a cryogenics technology company, while Del Greco held off, accepting a seat on the newly formed Board.

There's no SEC requirement that a private company's directors must make themselves publicly known or available, and there are several Board members whose names were never leaked to the public. Favorite candidates for such a "Shadow Board" include aliens (no evidence), government spies (some evidence), wealthy stakeholders from respectable corporations (probable), religious fanatics or cultists (no evidence) and ghosts (possible).

Spirits in the Material is available through our company store.

Q25. Who can see ghosts?

A25. Not everyone can see post-life entities. Our researchers aren't sure precisely why certain people can see PLEs and others cannot. The ability appears to be a combination of hereditary and environmental factors—and of course, much of our research is proprietary since it's our competitive advantage over other firms moving into this market space.

Q26. How does Orpheus Group interact with ghosts?

A26. Through three main methods. Some of our investigators can easily see PLEs, even those who aren't manifesting in a physical form you might recognize. And many post-life entities can see and communicate with consultants who can see them. Some of our consultants can also release their consciousness from their bodies and join the ghosts as insubstantial beings. In such a state they can better communicate with post-life entities, and assist them with their problems, help them move on further into the afterlife, or ask them for missing information critical to the living.

Q27. Do you have "ghost traps" or "ghost rays" or other high-tech equipment?

A27. No. Some of our investigators would rather we did, but Orpheus Group doesn't exist to trap ghosts or serve as a corporate cleanup service. Our research shows that most ghosts who remain near the living do so because something is holding onto them, keeping them from moving on. If a post-life entity becomes a nuisance, Orpheus Group consultants attempt to learn what people, events or things tie it to its past life, and endeavor to resolve those ties so the ghost can move on.

Q27. Are there different kinds of ghosts?

A27. Orpheus Group identifies three general types of post-life entities. These categories are not hard and fast and you should not take them as canon. The first kind of entity is a "static repeater." This ghost harmlessly repeats a series of actions over and over again, and is usually harmless except to the easily terrified. The second kind of post-life entity is a "violent reactive." These ghosts can perceive the world around them to a certain degree, and possess strong emotions regarding the living. Reactives generally act on those emotions, affecting our environment; they are dangerous. The third kind of post-life entity is the self-aware spirit. This kind of ghost is often the simplest to deal with since it responds well to ordinary human interaction, but it sometimes poses more intractable problems as well. Fortunately, Orpheus Group keeps detailed protocols for dealing with all three major kinds of post-life entities.

Q28. What should I do if it seems like a ghost is hassling me?

A28. Before contacting Orpheus Group, conduct a little investigation of your own. Our services, though affordable for clients with real problems, aren't worthwhile if we just show up at your apartment and tell you the spooky knocking at the window is a loose shutter. Experiences like that make for bitter and distrustful clients, and we don't want that any more than you do.

If you're certain you can only attribute your experiences, at home or in the workplace, to the activity of post-life entities, it's time to give Orpheus Group a call. Our Investigative Consultants are on call 24-7 to immediately assess, investigate and resolve your problems.

Q29. How can I be sure that once you say you've gotten rid of a ghost it's really gone?

A29. The Orpheus Group provides a 30-day money back guarantee for return manifestations of certified dispersed post-life entities. This guarantee does not cover the arrival of new ghosts to a location, and we recommend that clients who live at or near a psychic "hot spot" consider relocating. For persistent clients who do live at a "hot spot," Orpheus Group provides its Hotspot Platinum Program to help defray the cost of repeated interventions and dispersals. Contact a customer service specialist for more information.

Q31. What are ghosts made of?

A31. As described previously, our research is proprietary and gives us a strategic competitive advantage, which we can then pass on to you as savings. We can reveal a few facts to the general public, however. Post-life entities aren't composed of the same matter that constitutes living people. There are no atoms in a PLE, no molecules. There don't seem to be any particles at all, though some researchers suggest a kind of coherent, low-speed mass of neutrinos (neutrinos are very light, uncharged particles that almost never interact with ordinary matter) might explain the typical ghost's insubstantial, invisible nature.

PLEs do emanate electromagnetic fields... that is certain. These fields have a unique signature that has a direct effect on nearby electronics (shorting out computers, putting images onto the tube of a television, etc.).

PLE MODITOR

This handheld device allows for rudimentary detection of post-life entities. Orpheus engineers, however, had to make a few compromises to make it work as a handheld. It is about the size of a PDA, but only has 30 minutes of battery life and grows very warm to the touch after just one minute of continuous use. After one turn, the user can make a Perception + Computer roll to determine the number of ghosts within 50 meters and their rough location (to within about five meters). If the device's user can move around, he can triangulate nearby spooks' locations more effectively; successful subsequent Perception + Computer rolls allow him to reduce the margin of error by one meter per attempt.

These devices are usually available only to operatives who can't sense nearby ghosts or projected entities without aid. Since every ordinary Investigative Consultant can detect nearby spooks, Orpheus gives PLE Monitors to those employees who act as temporary ICs. Orpheus does have bigger and more effective non-portable versions of this device in key areas of their headquarters building.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

From Orpheus Group's "Investigative Consulting: Activities Manual"

Most organizations at Orpheus Group work the same way that similar organizations function at other corporations. Our Information Technology group, for example, handles computer hardware and software installation and maintenance much as an information technology group handles similar activities at a pharmaceutical manufacturer or automaker.

Orpheus Group Investigative Consultants have a job unlike any in the world. You are joining an elite team of uniquely talented professionals. Our work is never quite the same way two days in a row. This isn't like spending eight hours a day in front of a computer... but you might, once in a while. This isn't a job where your life is in danger... but it might be, once in a while. This isn't a job with a lot of glamour and prestige... but it can be, once in a while. This is a job where everything you do matters to someone. This is a job where you really can make a difference. This is a job where *no one else* in the world can do what you do.

EXCERPT FROM THE FAQ

Q30. Does my homeowner's insurance cover the dispersal of post-life entities?

A30. Probably not, at least, not yet. Orpheus Group is in negotiations with several nationwide home insurance providers to establish a usual, customary, reasonable (UCR) cost for typical services. Those in local, state and federal housing programs, however, need to be aware that none of those programs can offset the cost of Orpheus Group activities within their projects.

Q32. What distinguishes you from your competition?

A32. Orpheus Group is the innovator and market leader in the post-life dispersion field. Our results show a strong

upward revenue growth curve, and our technology leads the rest of the industry by three full years. Orpheus Group falls into Gartner's "Magic Quadrant" as a market space leader.

TRAINING

Orpheus Group Investigative Consultants receive top-notch training in a variety of fields. A newly hired consultant will not see field work for six months after hire, and the six months following training take place with a talented and experienced Investigative Consulting team. Only after a full year on the job will most consultants see individual small projects or act as fully contributing members of a larger consulting team.

We make no assumption about a new hire's level of education, and we provide training befitting the employee's education level.

Investigative Consultant training includes:

Psychology

Basic Physics

Electromagnetism

Life Sciences

Sociology

Philosophy of Life and Death

Comparative Religion

Introductory Business Communications

Investigative Consultants expecting to act in the field also receive basic physical training and self-defense classes; they may also earn firearms certification.

Consultants receive extensive training in personal thought regulation, autohypnosis and astral projection techniques. Lastly, we analyze Consultants (with the help of hypnosis, medical support and the assistance of more experienced projectors) for their aptitude to project their spirits outward away from their body. We do provide Consultants who prove unable to do this with the opportunity to become "sleepers"; we place their bodies in suspended animation and their spirits can roam on their own. Both methods of projecting astrally have an advantage, and we consider users of either technique as peers with the others.

INVESTIGATION

CONFIDENTIAL material:

DO NOT DISCLOSE to non-Orpheus personnel

The Investigative Consulting group sees business opportunities in three broad categories of post-life activity. The first concerns a PLE's pursuit of actions actively harmful to a person or place of business. Second category involves a PLE's loved ones hoping to help it move on or hoping to recover knowledge the ghost alone may have possessed.

The third category is everything else, including confidential, secure or highly specialized work. Further information on secure work is available to employees who complete their probationary period.

— From the research files of McKinley, Edward; Investigative Journalist



Everything else? Yeah, what does that mean exactly? Looks like it means a few exclusive, private possibly illegal activities. Orpheus people can project and become like ghosts. Is it trespassing if you ghost into a private residence and check on whether John is cheating on Marcia with Alice, if your body stays put in a legal place? What if your ghost form travels into a place of business? Or the operations center of a government hostile to the United States?

We don't know, but we can be sure Orpheus has a team of lawyers in place with boxes of legal briefs suggesting why each one should be legal. We know Orpheus trainers watch their recruits pretty closely. We know they don't offer legally and ethically questionable assignments to investigators deemed likely to squeal.

Murder for hire isn't done. Not officially, and not "off the books" — at least the ELT discourages it or isn't aware of any. That isn't to say it doesn't happen. Spend enough time as an Orpheus investigator and strange things happen to your perspective. "Death is just a doorway" is a phrase you'll hear a lot after a while. Given enough time on the job, certain Investigative Consultants adopt the idea that killing someone who might turn out a ghost anyway really isn't all that bad. I can't name any contract ghost hit squads, but there are plenty of rumors among the Investigative Consultants that NextWorld has a finger in that business.

Rumor has it the Board knows about the occasional contract killing, and exercises its clout to help cover the tracks of useful ICs involved in that activity.

PLE INVESTIGATION PROCEDURE

Orpheus' first step in investigating a Post-Life Entity is to contact the aggrieved parties. These may be homeowners, apartment dwellers, business owners, office workers, etc. PLEs tend to be tightly bound to places, people and things. Usually they are linked to more than

one item, person or area, however, which complicates your investigation. Additionally, they undertake varying activities—some are just static repeaters, while others are known as reactives and still others are self-willed entities.

Question One: What binds this PLE to the living world?

Question Two: What kind of PLE is this?

It is easy to eliminate a place-binding as the category where a given PLE may fall. Simply ask those affected by the ghost where they encountered the entity. If those you interview all give the same location or set of common locations, then this *may be* a place-bound PLE. If they give a wide range of answers to this question, then this is *probably not* a **place-bound** PLE.

If a PLE is not place-bound, speak to the widest possible range of people who saw the entity. Make sure to discover, for every instance of a given ghost's appearance, who was present. If one or a few people were almost always present when the ghost manifested, then odds are good that the ghost is in some way tied to that person or group. If no common thread seemingly exists in this fashion, then the PLE is probably not person-bound.

If both these criteria fail, then the ghost is probably **item-bound**. This poses the greatest difficulty, a needle-in-a-haystack problem. Search around the known locations and people where the ghost manifests and try finding items in common with those locations or in the possession of those people. The common items don't have to follow ordinary logic; they can be symbolically linked in the fashion that a gun and bullet are linked, or connected even further from corpse and bullet to gun to assailant.

Interviews remain the best way to determine what kind of ghost with which you are dealing. If all those you interview say the ghost appears in a horrible, gruesome-posed image, or it endlessly repeats the activity that killed it, then it is a **static repeater**. Distinguishing static repeaters from a **reactive**'s complex task sets can be hard. It is a safe bet that most of your clients will not be able to make such a determination for you. The key distinguishing feature is that most static repeaters don't damage the physical world, or if they do, they demolish the single target of their anger and are not roused again unless that thing is repaired or put back in place. Reactives rampage and destroy. They might need a trigger to do so, but they are aware enough to want to break things.

Free-willed ghosts will notice the presence of a projecting Orpheus operative and, most likely, interact with him or her directly, speaking if possible or providing clues and information in other ways if incapable of speech.

Question Three: Can the PLE be dispersed or its presence mitigated?

Contrary to the press kit, we don't always have to disperse (or "fumigate") a ghost to receive our fee (and the contract stipulates that). We must simply prevent the ghost from acting as a nuisance, or retrieve the necessary information from it.

We can disperse static repeaters by draining their energies through direct quasiphysical assault or by removing or destroying the binding object (if it is object-bound).

It is dangerous confronting reactives directly, and we have lost consultants to that kind of attempt before. Please do not join them. Attempt to uncover the source of the reactive's rage. If necessary, attract

the reactive's attention by flaring your own vitality, and then see if it is conscious enough to extract information from it. If it is, you're halfway home. You should be able to use that information to resolve the reactive's problem and be on your way.

Free-willed entities are the most difficult, because they certainly believe themselves to be people (whether they really are or not is a matter for the researchers) and as people, they believe themselves rational and open-minded. We know this reasoning to be false in the case of most ghosts. These entities are tied to the world for a reason. You may not be able to resolve their dilemma for them (they might prevent you, or you might wish not to interfere). If that is the case, simply exact the ghost's promise that it will not manifest, harass or otherwise interfere with the living in the areas it cares about. Explain to the ghost that, as a dead person, it has neither rights nor protections against Orpheus Group capture and experimentation. In that way you are likely to achieve its full cooperation.

MISCEULA NEOUS REFERRAL FEE

As a side note, Orpheus Group knows its consultants are always on the lookout for post-life activity and are generally motivated to help keep any supernatural activity from harming the general public. To further encourage that sort of altruism, Orpheus Group provides a referral fee. If any current employee refers a client to Orpheus Group, that employee will receive 1% of the gross

income (not the net) from that client for the duration of the client's business relationship with Orpheus Group. This is subject to terms and conditions; see your People Services representative if you believe you have an appropriate candidate.

DEALING WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT

As a representative of Orpheus Group, you are not an officer of the law. You are not permitted to undertake any activity that is ordinarily reserved to the police; you may not make arrests, for instance.



The activities of an Investigative Consultant, however, are likely to bring him into contact with the police. For example, one of the most common causes of a ghost infestation is unsolved murder. In 2000, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Melissa Gordon (age 6) disappeared on her way home from school; she was not found. On Melissa's birthday in 2001 her parents found themselves haunted by a ghost, and after a few terrified weeks contacted Orpheus Group. Our Investigative Consultants found that the ghost was in fact Melissa, who had been murdered by an uncle who lived outside of town. The ghost directed our team to her corpse in the desert and they, in turn, directed police to it; the city of Santa Fe successfully prosecuted Hector Gordon for Melissa's death recently. The Santa Fe Gordon case was a textbook example of the sort of cooperation that Orpheus Group tries cultivating with local police and sheriff's departments.

Unfortunately, such cooperation isn't always possible. In 2001 in Crawford, Texas, police arrested Simon Jones for rape and murder. Despite his protests of innocence, Jones was tried and convicted of the murder; he sat on death row when a group of ghosts — including the victim in Jones' case — led Orpheus Group consultants to another criminal entirely. The Crawford police refused to consider Orpheus-discovered evidence, and the local prosecutor had no interest in releasing Jones to try someone else for the crime. Our public relations teams and legal counsel are still pressing the case with state and federal prosecutors, but it is slow going.

In many municipalities, the possession of a private detective's license improves the responsiveness of the police or sheriff's department. Orpheus Group encourages all of its Investigative Consultants to acquire a private detective's license; the company reimburses the employee for both the license and examination fees to facilitate this.

In the ordinary course of your duty as an Investigative Consultant, you may find evidence of a crime. You are required by law to report a crime in progress to the police at your earliest opportunity. Keep in mind that most municipalities have yet to rule on the admissibility of eyewitness testimony from projecting Orpheus agents. As a result, our agents often face the conundrum that the law requires them to report a crime they witnessed even though authorities are unable to use their testimony in court. Orpheus policy is that its employees must hew

closely to the law, regardless of any apparent contradictions in its current application.

The book you have in your hand says that you should immediately run to the police if you find evidence of a crime. That's our policy on the books. Most of the time, in the field, it's bullshit. Use your best judgment. Take care of the job you got hired for; call the police if you're in real danger or think that their interference won't screw up your mission. You're under no compulsion to turn over criminal evidence to police investigators if you witness something while wandering around as a ghost. No judge in the land will admit ghost-witnessed testimony in either a criminal or civil case And along the same lines, Tony, Bobbi, you guys have no legal standing. You're dead. You don't have to report anything, and even if you did, they couldn't listen to you in a courtroom. So

— Overheard during Investigative Consultant training

When faced with old crimes, Orpheus agents are encouraged to act in the interests of truth and justice whenever possible and within the confines of the law. All Investigative Consultants receive emergency legal contact numbers; the attorneys who respond are on call 24 hours a day and can provide phone assistance or advice, or travel to an IC's location as needed. Orpheus has yet to encounter any old hauntings; no ghosts have been discovered with a death date earlier than around 2000. This suggests that Investigative Consultants are not likely to run into a 40-year-old murder case, or a crime for which the statute of limitations has expired.

The absence of old ghosts is a curious one. We are as yet not certain whether ghosts simply dissipate over time; if old ghosts give up on the material plane and make their way to the next world without assistance; or if ghosts are somehow tied to the corpse that they leave behind, decomposing as the body does. The oldest ghosts that remain active, of which we are aware, show no signs of dissipating despite the fact their corpses are well into decomposition.

This is a topic of great interest across several disciplines and organizations within Orpheus Group.

The Incident Learning Process or ILPs — as they are known — are not fun for anyone involved. When someone makes a major mistake, Orpheus Group loses a lot of money, an investigation goes to hell or when some of Orpheus' activities surface (risking exposure of the company's less savory undertakings), management calls for those responsible to participate in the Incident Learning Process.

For ordinary, boring cock-ups, an ILP is just the shuffling of paperwork and a scolding shake of the finger. Even if the disaster is pretty huge, fiscally speaking, so long as no permanent public relations or supernatural problems arise, the ILP will be ordinary Human Resources nonsense that you'd see in any other company.

If there's some kind of supernatural element to the problem, however, upper management becomes closely involved. I've only heard rumors, but the most persistent one has it that at least one member of the shadowy Board of Directors comes downstairs to participate in any major ILP. Projectors and ghosts of former employees become involved, picking their way through ILP participants' brains and generally scaring the hell out of anyone involved. These ILPs do not take place on company grounds! They take place way away from the city, somewhere that offers the executives plausible

deniability. A Motel 6, 30 miles south of city limits, is a particular favorite.

FORMER EMPLOYEES

The Orpheus Group has never suffered a mass layoff as companies in most other sectors have at one time or another. We choose our people carefully, and try to keep staffing levels precisely in line with our forecasted activity. On occasion this means we are too low-staffed for demand, but we believe this preferable to downsizing due to reduced revenues. Orpheus Group is aware it is currently in a growth phase, and our Forecasting and Demand Planning Team keeps an eye out for a business plateau that would cause us to decelerate our recruiting strategy.

For whateverreason, however, some employees do leave Orpheus' service. The company typically offers one-month severance pay for employees forced to quit due to business conditions, and this amount may be increased to satisfy an accelerated-retirement program at Orpheus' discretion. Nondisclosure agreements signed by employee upon hiring are valid for two years from the employee's last day of work, and supplemental NDAs may be valid for even longer periods. Note that these nondisclosure agreements expressly allow Orpheus to periodically use post-life methods to survey former employee for evidence pertaining to a possible breach of confidential information. Certain nondisclosure agreements are binding even beyond the point of physical death, with penalties payable by the estate of the deceased.

— Interdepartmental Terrel & Squib memo

Terrel Squib

Make sure you got that right. They reserve the right to use ghosts and projecting consultants to make sure you aren't violating nondisclosure, even after you've quit or been fired. Very forward-thinking. Also, take careful note of the "penalties payable by the deceased's estate" thing. Once your estate is gone, or once it's clear they can't threaten you by threatening your estate, what do you think they're going to do to you? Their only option left is to try and disperse you, and I'm sure they'd do that if they felt they had no other choice. They've made it abundantly clear that they don't believe ghosts have ordinary rights like those reserved for the living — their consultants are ghosts have ordinary rights like those reserved for the living — their consultants are happy to disperse nuisance ghosts that can't be taken care of any other way. I expect

they'll give former employees the same treatment if necessary.

I keep hearing rumors that someone in People Services or some freelancers working in adjunct to a Board member are developing technology to bind ghosts. Of course, the same rumors suggest we might be trying to work out Hermetic or Kabbalistic magical schemes to bind ghosts, or disperse them, and I don't put any truck into that stuff. The existence of ghosts is just another scientific phenomenon, one that follows its own rules. We just have to figure out what those rules are, and what we can do within the

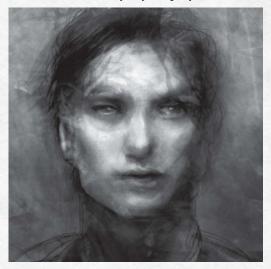
confines of them.

SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

— From a sample stockholder's annual report created in preparation for the Orpheus Group Initial Public Offering (IPO). The IPO never took place.



One of our core operating philosophies, as expressed in our mission statement, is Our people are our uniquely talented greatest resource. To that end, included in this report are not merely the members of the Board of Directors but some of the everyday employees who make Orpheus such a vital and innovative organization.

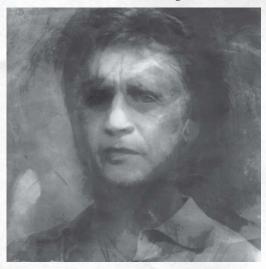


Jack Tilton, Chief Executive Officer

Best known for the so-called Archalloy Miracle heralded in the business press some five years ago, Jack Tilton is the vigorous and innovative CEO of Orpheus Group. The former CEO of steel distributor Archalloy, Tilton turned that company around, bringing it to \$US10M profitability after more than ten years of it floating around the zero mark.

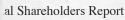
Tilton came to Orpheus two years ago at the behest of the Board of Directors, saying he was looking for a new challenge. The Board chose Jack Tilton because he provides a charismatic and energetic face for the company, and because his unique vision enables us to provide a strong return to our investors.

Tilton came aboard to replace Bob Jackson after Jackson's death in the wake of the Project Flatline incident (see File #45602). Investigators haven't been able to trace Jackson's death to anything but natural causes, despite our suspicions. Tilton has strong supporters on the board, particularly Jane Kennedy, who lobbied most strongly to bring him aboard. The rest, including Chairman George Oliver, are just waiting for him to make a mistake. The Archalloy Miracle does not appear to have been a fluke — Tilton has a good sense of business, at least in the manufacturing distribution sector. If he can handle the new high profile of Orpheus, we expect that the trades will herald him as a new Michael Dell or Jack Welch by the end of the decade.



George Oliver, Chairman

George Oliver joined the Board of Directors in 1995 and became Chairman in 2001. His business acumen is matched only by his sense of dedication to our local community and the broader world community. In addition to acting as the Chairman of the Board of Orpheus Group, George Oliver sits on the Board of Trustees of State Polytechnic University, serves on the Advisory Panel to the International Red Cross and volunteers for several smaller charities here in the city. After finding his first success in real estate, Chmn. Oliver reached his current stature through shrewd investment throughout the 1990s. As noted in a recent issue of *Business Week*, Oliver also sits on the boards of Owens-Corning Corporation and Hewlett-Packard. George Oliver is an immigrant to the United States, having moved south from Shag Harbour, Nova Scotia in his teens.



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It should come as no surprise that HP provides the lion's share of high tech gadgetry and computers to Orpheus Group, and it's probably also no surprise that a recent getry and computers to Orpheus Group, and it's probably also no surprise that a recent getry and computers to Orpheus Group, and it's probably also no surprise that a recent getry and computers to Orpheus Group, and Exerybody scratches everybody's ghost-clearing at OC's Toledo facilities received more press coverage than a similar ghost-clearing at OC's Toledo facilities received more press a leader in the fumigation at East Bay Kodiak in Rochester did. Everybody scratches everybody's ghost-clearing at OC's Toledo facilities received more press a leader in the allows Tilton to keep the ghost phenomenon. He's interested in the bottom line. He allows Tilton to keep the ghost phenomenon. He's interested in the bottom line. He allows Tilton to keep the ghost phenomenon. He's interested in the bottom line. He allows Tilton to keep the ghost phenomenon. He's interested in the bottom line. He allows Tilton to keep the ghost phenomenon. He's interested in the bottom line. He allows Tilton to keep the ghost phenomenon. He's interested in the bottom line. He allows Tilton to keep the ghost phenomenon at East Bay Kodiak in Rochester did. Everybody scratches everybody's ghost phenomenon at East Bay Kodiak in Rochester did. Everybody scratches everybod



Anne Del Greco, Ph.D., Founder and Board Member

Anne Del Greco holds a Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering from the University of Pittsburgh, as well as several honorary degrees from institutions across the United States and Canada. She is one of the founding partners of Orpheus Group and has been a part of the organization since its inception in the early 1980s, when it was known as JDG Cryogenics. Since JDG Cryogenics' transformation into Orpheus, Ms. Del Greco has left her position in direct management and joined the Board of Directors, though her knowledge of the cryogenic field remains keen; she is a Visiting Professor in the Engineering department at MIT and frequently provides consultation to the Engineering Leadership Team.

Del Greco is one of two Board members with an unusual interest in the "traditional" occult. We don't have many details on this interest, but according to old credit card records, she made a spate of purchases at some of the weirder incense-and-black-curtains bookstores down on the South Side right after Jane Kennedy came back to the land of the living; she's maintained her "hobby" since then. She's sane and stable — she does not practice astrology, nor does she talk about "spirit guides" or any of the usual New Age material. Her interests tend to go a little earlier — Crowley and his ilk are favorites. Del Greco has always claimed to have been an innocent bystander to Bob Jackson's loss of power in 1993-1994, but Jackson ended up in management and Del Greco on the Board. She couldn't have been all that innocent.



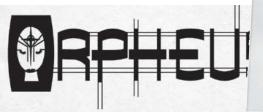
Jane Kennedy, Board Member

After Jane Kennedy emerged from cryosleep and received life-saving modern cancer treatments in 1991, she found that her stake in JDG Cryogenics had become a large and successful investment. Since that time, she's been a powerful influence in the company's emergence into the limelight and its subsequent success. Ms. Kennedy holds degrees from the University of Massachusetts and the University of Southern California, and she also sits on the Board of Directors of Viacom and several local charities.

Jane Freeman married into the prestigious Massachusetts Kennedy family when she was quite young, and she retained her new surname even after her divorce in 1982. After an aborherself facing terminal cancer. Orpheus' own documents, above, reflect what happened next; divorce settlement was generous enough to nedy has been cagey when asked whether she world currently. We believe that she could, but in at least one incident since her emergence from cryo-sleep, she has projected.

hareholders Report

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Brandeis was originally responsible for the questionable scheme allowing Orpheus to take advantage of comatose clients' personal fortunes. Currently, more clients are refusing that, and the further Orpheus ventures into the mainstream, the less likely they are to insist on it. It also helps that their current success dictates they *need* that kind of thing less. Rumors persist that pending lawsuits will unearth the disposition of these accounts, but we believe that Orpheus will either settle out of court or, less palatably, use its "intangible assets" to eliminate evidence that could prove bothersome.

Elizabeth Brandeis, Chief Financial Officer

Elizabeth Brandeis holds an MBA from the Harvard Business School and has worked in finance in the medical and health services industry for over 20 years, with a full decade spent at Orpheus Group/JDG itself. She is an avid golfer.

Murthy Chandrawati, M.D., Ph.D., Chief Physician

Dr. Murthy Chandrawati has a medical doctorate from the University of Michigan and a Ph.D. in biochemistry from the Johns Hopkins University. He has led the Life Sciences Team at Orpheus Group for five years, during which time the group made astounding leaps in its understanding of the line between life and death, and the path that a person follows after death.

Other Core Personnel

The Board of Directors and key leadership team members are all useful, but before we invest any venture capital in this thing, we need to know

who's really playing an important role.

Ilona Darewell, Head Trainer Ms. Darewell is one of the longest-serving Investigative Consultants in Orpheus. She grew up in a violent neighborhood in Houston, Texas, and nearly died after a miscarriage in 1993. Not long after that, she moved into town and took a job as a receptionist for Orpheus Group. She claimed at that time she could see spirits and communicate with the dead, but Orpheus did not take those claims seriously until after Bob Jackson's death in 1996. At that time, Darewell became one of the first Investigative Consultants on Orpheus' payroll. She has a strong track record in investigation and in ghost dispersal, but focuses on training new ICs. Her demeanor is somewhat abrasive, though she uses a far more urban and tough persona when instructing students than she does when dealing with clients or ghosts. Darewell cannot project instantly, as many Orpheus consultants can.

Shawn Failor, Investigative Consultant Failor is a young IC, just 19 when he began. He escaped childhood leukemia after a miracle recovery at the age of 13. Two years ago, when on an internship with Orpheus Group, he happened to be available when Morgan Chemical called Orpheus in a panic. Their chief financial analyst, Allen Fischer, had died of a heart attack just an hour after changing the password to a critical financial spreadsheet. The spreadsheet governed US\$100M worth of assets, and Morgan did not have the time or computing assets to do a brute-force solution on the password. Failor took the call, never revealing his age or inexperience to Morgan Chemical personnel. He projected his consciousness to the hospital where Fischer's ghost lurked, and coaxed the password from it in a matter of hours.

Failor's success led to a writeup of Orpheus' activities in local business news sources, and the story spread nationwide in a time when business news was slow. This exposure drastically raised Orpheus' profile and revenues alike, singlehandedly making Jack Tilton a success. Tilton is at least somewhat aware of this, having joked that he owes Shawn Failor his job.

Dr. Chandrawati is very attractive, and has quite the libido. Office rumor invariably ties him to the most attractive female hire on the floor, and the scuttlebutt is that he has at least two children by women other than Mrs. Chandrawati. Around Christmas of last year, a young blonde showed up at the office with a darker-skinned child that she insisted was Murthy's, and she made quite a scene when Internal Security refused to admit her to see him. Nobody knows who the woman was or what happened to her or the child since then.



Orpheus Annual Shareholders Report

DIRTY LITTLE SECRETS

The following rumors come from a variety of sources. Most are likely to be false.

NEXTWORLD

RE: Project Flatline and the Marion Fire
Links between Orpheus and the fire in the lockdown section of Marion Federal Penitentiary are tenuous at best. Primarily they come through photographs of three men, all well-dressed professionals traveling in rental cars. All three men were present at Marion the day of the fire. Photographic evidence shows that all three men were subsequently entering and leaving Orpheus Group headquarters at different times.

Two of the men cannot be positively identified. One of them, in contrast, is Major Matthew Shanahan, a former U.S. Army Intelligence officer. According to Army records, Shanahan died while on classified duty in the Philippines in 1994.

Beyond these three ciphers, we have no concrete evidence tying Orpheus Group directly to the fire at Marion, nor do we have any solid theories as to what the company might gain from the disaster. The leading theory, however, is that the deaths of a few dozen inmates at a federal prison for violent criminals would surely lead to terrifying ghost activity in the surrounding areas. Such activity would drive up demand for Orpheus services.



Alien Technology and Orpheus Group!

Orpheus Group's claims of contact with the afterlife are entirelyfalse, according to Charles Gounaris, a spokesman for the Global UFO Information Network (GLUFOIN). "We have photographic evidence placing Orpheus Chairman George Oliver at Shag Harbour, Nova Scotia on or around October 7, 1967, the date a UFO crashed into the sound at Shag Harbour. We believe Oliver's presence there and the eventual rise of Orpheus Group's science-fiction technology is not simply coincidence."

Instead, Gounaris goes on to explain, GLUFOIN believes Oliver was involved in a joint US-Canadian attempt to recover alien technology from the Shag Harbour crash, and in payment for his services, Oliver received alien cryogenics (used to keep alien crews in stasis for long space journeys) and medical technology. "Remember," Gounaris points out, "that it wasn't until George Oliver became associated with JDG Cryogenics that it became Orpheus Group and saw the beginnings of its current level of success.

"Perhaps you could ask Jane Kennedy for the real story." He continued, referring to the subject of Orpheus Group's first successful resuscitation (and a current member of the Orpheus Board of Directors).



WAS Oliver there?

Did he see a UFO like this one at Shag Harbor?

GHOSTS OF HQ

Smudge Report: Orpheus Group Employs Ghosts

WEBDATE: 23 OCT 2001

My own local sources passed this tidbit along just recently and it was too sweet not to share with you, my loyal readers. It seems that in addition to solving the problems of the "recently departed," as Orpheus Group spinmistress Margaret Burns prefers to call ghosts and spirits, Orpheus Group also employs the same people. In fact, my confidential sources tell me Orpheus Group Investigative Consultants (as their spook spooks are known) were overheard referring to a recently deceased co-worker as though he was still active! And our intrepid source LyreLiar says he's seen employment contracts that actually stipulate the option to continue post mortem. What do the dead need with paychecks? Are there DVD players in the afterlife? You've got me, Mr. and Mrs. America, but the Smudge Report won't stop until the truth comes out.

Alien Mutations of Orpheus Group Process

Ms. Rosalia Pampena, of Lima, Peru, reported seeing horrifically ugly "ghosts," only to discover they weren't ghosts but rather Orpheus Group personnel on a mission! Pampena, speaking exclusively to The Monitor, was comatose after an automobile accident in downtown Lima when she distinctly recalled seeing four "monsters" while unconscious. "The monsters were human in form and speech," she said, "but one had insect eyes and wings, and another was covered in blood...." Ms. Pampena went on to describe the other creatures in the group, which our staff artist has attempted to replicate. Imagine Rosalia Pampena's surprise when, after her release from the hospital, she saw photographs of "los cuatro monstros" looking like perfectly ordinary people in an American newspaper! The four monsters Ms. Pampena saw were Orpheus Group investigators, she's absolutely certain. Why did she see them in her coma? Were they invading her mind with technologies recovered from UFO wreckage, or did she expand her consciousness to a higher plane while unconscious? Were the four investigators transformed into monsters as a function of the alien technology, or as a metaphorical representation of Orpheus Group's dark purposes? The Monitor flew Rosalia Pampena to Dallas, Texas, to speak with noted psychotherapist and dream interpretation specialist Dr. Freddie Kang Dr Kang had this to say:

"One had insect eyes and wings... and another was covered in blood!"

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Employees at Headquarters Operations

FROM: T. Ford, Internal Security

DATE: 3 March

SUBJECT: Fumigation of HQ

The Headquarters building will be closed this weekend for PLE dispersal due to persistent reports of four distinct and unauthorized PLEs lurking in different parts of the building. We apologize for the inconvenience, especially those close to the closing of the books for this year. Hopefully the extremely persistent PLE some of you refer to as "Mary" will be rectified at this time. We apologize once again for the inconvenience.

Police Open Investigation into Jackson Death BARRINGTON, March 4, 1996 -

Orpheus Group CEO Robert Jackson of Barrington died unexpectedly Sunday, and local police are asking questions about the death. Representatives of Jackson's estate and his family doctor issued statements that Jackson died of natural causes but, according to Barrington Police Chief Michael Nealy, "You have to wonder what's going on when all them spooks are involved."

The police department has publicly admitted to not having resources that could undertake a ghostly investigation, so ironically it is possible they may contract investigators from Orpheus Group to look into Jackson's demise.

Jackson, 53, formed JDG Cryogenics with Anne Del Greco in 1986 to serve terminally ill clients who wished to undergo suspended animation, in the hope JDG might revive them when medical technology proved adequate to their condition.

STATE, FEDERAL REGULATORS HAVE ORPHEUS QUESTIONS

The Federal Department of Health and Human Services announced today it was opening an investigation into the activities of Orpheus Group, a local company claiming it can communicate with ghosts in the afterlife. In related news, Department of Revenue auditors recently suggested scrutinizing Orpheus Group's books more closely.

HHS Assistant Undersecretary Abraham Short said today that federal regulators have a responsibility to the American public to ensure Orpheus Group's activities don't violate medical ethics. He also called upon the IRS to help ascertain the validity of Orpheus' repeated claims that it can verifiably make contact with the afterlife.

CONTINUED ON D3

INTERNAL MEMO

FROM: H. Magnusson, Director, Special Projects TO: All Investigative Consultants

DATE: 19 Feb

CC: BN, JT

SUBJECT: Pigment Users

Use special caution when engaging in insubstantial activity near users of the street drug pigment. Verified reports from several IC teams indicate pigment users can see and, in some cases, act upon projectors as well as ghosts directly. Pigment users are to be avoided wherever possible.

On the 25th of December of last year, an IC team led by Leopold Straut encountered three ghosts who had been troubling Indianapolis moneylender Edward Scranton. In the middle of resolving the ghosts' issues, Straut and his team encountered a group of youths who had recently partaken of pigment. The youths noticed all of Straut's team (both those physically present and those who were purely incorporeal) as well as all three ghosts. Upon further interrogation, the youths uniformly provided identical, correct descriptions of all those involved.

Tilton: Orpheus Books are Clean

Orpheus Group's books are as clean as a whistle, says CEO Jack Tilton. This announcement comes in the wake of open skepticism from state and federal regulators about the veracity of Tilton's reports on Orpheus Group's activities. Tilton's auditors of choice, Deloitte & Touche, verified that no accounting discrepancies exist in the company's financial systems, while CFO Elizabeth Brandeis has similarly signed off on the books. Tilton himself challenged IRS and State Department of Revenue auditors to have a look of their own.

IRS and Federal Health and Human Services officials backed down from their recent interest in Orpheus' activities; the only official statement on the matter came from the IRS' Douglas Ackerback, who said, "The IRS is satisfied that Orpheus Group isn't committing any crimes." During the height of Internet IPO mania, it was widely believed that Orpheus Group intended to go public itself, but backed down at the last minute. Market watchers believe the jitters manifested because of the company's uncertainty as to how the general public would treat the stock price of an enterprise so closely associated with death.

See ORPHEUS, p.A-6

Ben Cotton stood in the doorway of the opulently appointed master bedroom suite. Before him lay the body of a white male in his early thirties, a silver letter opener stuffed deep into the socket of one lifeless eye. The man's black satin pajamas had taken on a macabre sheen after being bloodied and now glinted softly in the half-light. Against the wall by the bed, about as far away from the doorway as one could get and still be in the same room, sat the huddled figure of a woman. She rocked back and forth on her heels as she sat, her eyes glazed over and her make-up smeared gray. Her knotted blond hair hung loose about her face, nearly touching the smoking bulb of seared flesh on her neck.

The woman was downright hysterical, and Ben couldn't honestly blame her. She had just watched as some unseen force made a whirlwind of her bedroom, one that ultimately resulted in the grisly murder of her louse of a husband. And she had done so after having already weathered a terrifying campaign of inexplicable events — one set in motion by Ben himself, not four days ago.

The dead man on the floor was a wife-beater. His name was Derrick, according to the strangled pleas of his wife, Linda, and he seemed to get off on blaming her for shit that couldn't possibly have been her fault. Ben hated guys like him, so when the last case dropped him in the living room of this married couple, he decided to stick around and see what he could do. At first, he tried scaring the guy into shaping up; a few midnight wake-up calls, a couple of convenient spills... nothing major. But when that failed, Ben resorted to insinuating that the source of Derrick's recent bad luck was his own wife's growing discontentment (which, in a way, was true). Ben wanted Derrick to fear his wife. And that's when things got serious.

Derrick responded to this last revelation by branding his wife a freak... literally. Derrick had waited for her to fall asleep, then padded his way downstairs to the den — and the fireplace. Ben watched as Derrick lifted a poker from the hot coals, followed as the son of a bitch calmly returned upstairs to sear his wife's neck. That finally set Ben off.

Company protocol in situations like this ordered the agent to vacate the premises immediately, leaving trace of neither presence nor passage. Orpheus Group did not abide its agents being connected to anything so... messy as this. The company didn't train its grunts this hard for them simply to be caught, or worse yet, fail. If Ben was one to follow protocol, his next move would be to leave this woman to what he'd wrought. But that was always a big "if" with Ben Cotton.

Fuck that, he'd thought.

That was when the room exploded into a vortex of implements accelerated to murderous speeds by Ben's rage....

Ben stepped forward into the room, walking gingerly around the man's corpse as though passing through it would somehow taint him. He glided across the covering of shattered debris and over to an armoire set against the far wall. After concentrating his will for a moment, he reached out with his mind and lifted a tube of red lipstick into the air. With focused intensity, Ben scrawled his phantom message onto the vanity mirror while the grief-streaked woman gazed on in muted disbelief. When it was done, she burst into fresh tears.

This is Not Your Fault, read the mirror's new crimson legend.

The scene should have been alien to Ben. He'd never known his biological family, nor any family beyond the timid hutch of nuns who had borne his presence for a few years of his growing up. Not to say he knew nothing of family, of course. No, Ben had seen enough "families" like this to last him two lifetimes.

Oh, yes, if there was one thing Ben knew for sure, it was that the ties that bind make no promises beyond their bondage; that having a family only makes the pain of betrayal that much harder to bear. Ben had seen it a thousand times, and in the end, the only truth he had learned of home life was that it unquestionably localized despair. And despite his best efforts to the contrary, tonight had provided more proof positive....

Home is where the hurt is.

CHAPTER TWO: SHADES, LAMENTS AND HORRIBLE THINGS



(static)...best be careful out there, 'cause every day's a final exam and Death's got a steep learning curve (static)....

- Radio-Free Death

Mick: We're gathered here today... um... because you're all dead.

- Idle Hands

It is humanity's nature to classify and quantify everything with neat little definitions. It stems from prehistoric times when men and women ascribed definitions to that which they didn't understand. The sun traveled through the sky by way of chariot, snake or just pure divine will. The moon rose after it in dusk and retreated before it in dawn, thus indicating its polar opposition. If sun meant revelation then moon meant hidden or shrouded. Early man needed these definitions desperately, for in understanding the different roles in the universe, he understood his place by comparison to the scheme of the incomprehensible.

It is no different now. Primitive fear has become scientific conquest, but it's basically the same superstitions cloaked under masks of civility. In **Orpheus**, the following categories exist to compartmentalize the universe into easier-to-digest packets. Orpheus Group's scientists created them as part of their process of dissection, peeling back each layer one at a time to reveal some hidden facet of the universe. This process made them feel better when confronting a reality that belied and even superceded their foundational physics.

This chapter encompasses Orpheus Group's understanding of things as they currently know reality, and thus, how players and Storytellers alike respond to their world. That which defies category is thrust to the side, awaiting recognition when scientists believe they fathom the "truth" more clearly.

WHOARE YOU?

In the business of the dead, there are two general principles that define your existential being. They dictate your capabilities and often define your personality and outlook. That's not to say, however, they are the limits of the spectrum like those authors who claim that only one story to the world exists in "Boy meets Girl...." These are merely the categories that exist for the moment, those predicated on another concept being introduced later (see pp. 81-97).

The first principle is that of **Shades**, or the five different Characteristic Templates. They are partial roadmaps for how we approached life, and thus, what we are and what we can accomplish in death (through **Horrors**, a spirit's powers). The second classification is that of **Lament**, or one of four basic species of supernatural entities available to characters. The two classifications (Shade and Lament) combine to form 20 different character variants before the player even ascribes personal touches such as roles, Nature and Demeanor modifiers and the various Traits.

SHADES

Characters fall into five major Characteristic Templates, which we call Shades. These are reflections of one's actions in life; while they do not necessarily encompass everyone who believes or feels a particular way, they give an outline for those who choose specific approaches to life, and who behave in certain ways. These Shades describe the person's general profile while living, and the powers they'll likely manifest in death.

Nature may dictate a character's true identity, but their characteristic Shade determines how they approach matters, who they try to be, how they apply their outlook and, sometimes, how life treats them back. A Poltergeist may have dozens of possible reasons for fury and frustration, but they all come down to the same end result: blunt force, brutal action and hair-trigger anger. Wisps may act out of a desire to brighten the lives of others, or to bring some form of enlightenment or to cause a bit of pain in the lives of those around them, but they always distract, charm and deceive. It may be someone's Nature to be a Celebrant, indulging in what makes him happy, but he could also be a Poltergeist (his Shade), believing that his joys are few and far between. His Nature might even feed his frustration and rage, every time something disappoints his Celebrant impulses. Alternatively, a Wisp Celebrant might combine his enthusiasm for slick deception and fast talk with his desire to enjoy life, seeing each new exploit as amusement rather than work. In this vein, each Shade has a recommended list of suitable Natures that fit well with the concept. Players are encouraged to choose outside that vein, however; the suggested Natures are not intended as exclusive.

Players may choose from the following Shades in defining their characters:

Banshees: Banshees voice insight, understanding the emotions of others and foreseeing what those emotions will cause. This insight drives them to help others work through their pain and resolve their problems, from the living who cannot endure their lives to the dead who are trapped in endless cycles of repetition. This Shade speaks from soul to soul, giving a voice to those who have no words for their grief. They can, however, be too slow to act, trapped by not wanting to inflict further pain or by being too willing to see every point of view and choose none.

Possible Roles: Cop, Prostitute, Inner-City School Teacher, Torture-Abuse Survivor, Theater Director.

Haunters: Haunters can adapt to anything, and make themselves at home wherever they may be; equally, they are constantly driven to new places and new adventures, never content with their current standing. They are the spirit of enterprise, and also the essence of adaptation. They can possess objects, from potted plants to cars to buildings, and control them to a limited degree. Haunters *like* belonging, at least for a while, and blend into their new surroundings as everyone's friend, discovering things about places that people who lived there all their lives hadn't noticed. The urge to move on also constantly drives them; no place is ever enough, and nothing ever truly satisfies. While they can adopt local coloration like a chameleon, they can also be as inconstant as the wind.

Possible Roles: Detective, Construction Worker, Truck Driver, Eco-Terrorist, Inner-City Graduate, Spy

Poltergeists: Poltergeists embody frustration and anger, using their pent-up rage as a blunt force. With experience comes control and precise manipulation of such small things as pens and scalpels. To them, life is nothing but frustration. This Shade is a manifestation of the sudden outbursts

that anybody can experience when life becomes too much, and when an unendurable situation is suddenly resolved in white-hot, brilliant rage. They use their frustration to give them power, and work through it to affect the world, but equally, they cannot exist without it.

Possible Roles: Third-World Child, Smoke Jumper, Emergency Room Doctor, Grunt, Reformed Drug User, Embittered Child Prodigy

Skinrider: Skinriders are the essence of control; control of others, control of themselves, control of the world around them. They have no faith that anybody other than themselves can do a job properly. As far as they're concerned, the world needs sorting out, and only they have the ability or willpower to do so. They may lead from the front, organizing matters up close and personal, or they may command from behind, manipulating others through direct control or force of will. Whether people like their methods or not, the Skinrider can create a smooth-running operation; some Skinriders count the cost, however, while others... do not.

Possible Roles: Firefighter, Security Guard, Cashier, Guerilla Athlete, Perfect Mother

Will-o'-the-Wisp (or Wisp): These Shades are distraction given form, tricksters whether or not there's a need for it, and confidence artists with enough charisma to sell their claims. They lead others astray; sometimes to truth, sometimes not. Gifted with an ability to charm and mesmerize, they are the constant life of the party, and an occasional thorn in the side to their friends. They may act as they do to cheer others and to smooth situations, or they may not realize or care that their antics come at the expense of others. Embodiments of speed, wit and guile, they fascinate wherever they go, but can have difficulty understanding that their actions have consequences. Some may not even care.

Possible Roles: Bicycle Messenger, Journalist, Prostitute, Reformed Criminal, Political Speechwriter

<u>DEFAULT ABILITIES</u>

Orpheus has two sets of Default Abilities, one listed here and one listed in Chapter Three (see Personality Archetypes: Nature and Demeanor, pp. 147-160) that pertains to those abilities gained through Nature groupings. The ones listed here are innate to characters by the very nature of their existence as ghosts or projected entities.

DEAD-EYES

Most spooks (excluding drones), can perceive both the living and the dead with equal clarity. Even when manifesting to the living or occupying a body, the character can still see dead people automatically without roll. More so, by rolling Perception + starting Vitality (difficulty 6), the character can determine how much Vitality someone actually possesses. The exceptions to this ability are those spooks inhabiting an object or possessing a person, in which case they are "invisible" unless they choose to reveal themselves.

INCORPOREAL AND INVISIBLE

To be dead... to walk through walls and spy on people at your leisure because you're invisible and insubstantial. Sounds like a real treat if it didn't come with a few tradeoffs, like running from Spectres and angry ghosts. Still, it can be a benefit when used to flitter to places most people would prefer remained hidden.

A metaphysical reality of ghosthood or projecting is that spooks must still spend one Vitality point to willingly pass through obstructions for the duration of a scene (so a ghost can will himself through a door, a person, a car and a window all in one scene at a cost of one Vitality). Otherwise, the character loses a Vitality point a turn for anything that passes through him. The reason is that objects possess an ethereal resistance that prevents the spook from affecting them normally, but in turn, forces the spook to adhere to the universe's natural laws. Thus, in this state, each object that either passes through a spook or through which he passes bleeds off some of his Vitality; so instead of costing a Vitality per scene, it now costs the character a Vitality per turn. It's an indication that the character's gauze was pulled and partially dispersed through the action of interacting with a physical object. If bullets hit the character and he hasn't spent Vitality to become completely insubstantial, he loses a Vitality per turn for as long as he remains in this state while taking damage.

Only specific attacks that can harm ghosts and projected entities (like other ghosts, Horrors, Spectres and special weapons) will actually damage them for more than one Vitality point per turn.

The character can upset some natural laws through Vitality expenditure, but not the basic foundations of our reality (gravity, time, momentum, etc.). That means a spook can walk through a window without dropping through the floor (as a willfully directed act), but once the character walks out the window, he will fall and hit the ground. Neither can ghosts and projected entities fly; they must climb stairs and ladders to reach places, but can still walk through doors. Likewise, he can drop through one floor and stop at the next, though gravity and momentum still affect the fall.

Additionally, some objects are simply too dense to affect or pass through because their thickness creates such a strong buffer. Thus, a character might be able to leap through the street into the sewer below, but he can't dive into farmland to hide in the earth.

Finally, the character is capable of walking on water if he so wishes since water has enough surface tension to support the near null-weight of a non-manifest ghost.

MANIFEST

All ghosts and projected entities can manifest to the living to various degrees. This means they can be seen by, heard by or even interact with the living with varying success. There are different stages for manifestations, each based upon the expenditure of Vitality, but only spooks with a starting Vitality of four or greater can manifest fully,

appearing and interacting with the living as though alive. In fact, most folks would be hard-pressed to prove a manifested spook is in fact a construct of congealed gauze without a physical exam. This ability is key to ghosts, especially, since it means they are no longer isolated from the living.

In this state, the spook looks as he did when alive. He cannot change his appearance, whether altering his eye or hair color, or adding extra pounds. He wears whatever clothing best symbolizes his nature or appearance, or whatever he wore last before projecting. Active Stains don't appear on manifest characters either, but they can use Horrors and physical objects alike.

Manifesting is a spook's innate sense that he can push through whatever renders him invisible and incorporeal to the living. It's like the air around him is humid and thick, though he only feels its presence when he focuses on it. Nothing around him feels or seems different otherwise. When the spook concentrates on that feeling, however, he gains a sense that he can somehow push *into* it rather than just drifting through his surrounding environment. Just that sense is enough to allow him to manifest with the slightest effort for the duration of the scene.

Each Shade has innate manifestation forms that allow the character to appear and affect the living world. This ability is dependent on Vitality, with zero-point expenditures allowing the character to manifest as a small environmental change, like mood lighting with some ingame effects. Drones are capable of this manifestation level only, giving rise to most ghost sightings. This is why weak ghosts appear as they do, whether as reflections, balls of light or disembodied voices.

Those ghosts with a normal Vitality of two or three can assume their Shade's second manifestation form, which gives them greater control over their surroundings. Only spooks rated at four Vitality or greater can manifest fully.

Fully manifested spooks appearance differs, according to their current Vitality. At 7+ Vitality, a manifested ghost appears human; at 8+ she is warm to the touch because it's actually their Vitality that's affecting the other person. She isn't warm to instruments, however; thermometers register such beings at room temperature and infrared goggles won't detect them. Likewise, they have a heartbeat even if they don't actually have internal organs. When a ghost's Vitality falls below seven, evidence of his true state grows more and more undeniable, even when he is manifested. A ghost killed in a skydiving accident may exhibit head contusions at six, mottled bruises at five, a pronounced limp at four, obviously broken bones at three, battered and unrecognizable facial features at two, and may appear a mass of bipedal, hamburgered flesh at one. Despite this variance, the spook doesn't really feel different even though he may appear horrendous. Whatever pain he experienced was only temporary, though Storytellers may incur health level penalties to characters manifesting with Vitality six or lower to reflect long-standing injuries, ailments or because the event was so traumatic as to be psychologically scarring. In this case, zero Vitality is equivalent to Incapacitated in penalties, with each increment up in Vitality mirroring the progression of health levels in damage (Vitality 1 = Crippled; Vitality 2 = Mauled; Vitality 3 = Wounded; Vitality 4 = Injured; Vitality 5 = Hurt; Vitality 6 = Bruised).

How does manifesting feel to you, the character? You feel human because that's mostly what you've known throughout your existence. If someone touches you, you feel the contact, not because of specific nerve impulses (you have none), but because you remember that's how it felt to be touched. If memory is strong enough to make you appear as you did, then it's only fitting that it should make you feel as you did as well. All this is automatic, however, and requires no forethought on your part.

Finally, fully manifesting carries one major inherent danger. The character can be hurt by spook and human alike. Most often, the incorporeal cannot hurt the physical, and vice versa (except under specific conditions). Manifested characters exist in a dual state, however, meaning other spooks can affect them just as humans can — with mundane implements such as a gun or knife. Conversely, the character can affect both ghosts and humans now, as though they all existed in the same state.

SHADE BREAKDOWN

Each entry under Shade includes the following information:

Horrors: The different Shades possess different Horrors, or abilities, that express how they deal with the world around them. Characters automatically earn the first Horror of their Shade (in *italics*), and may buy the second Horror during Character Creation or choose one from outside their Shade (though some Horrors are prohibited to certain Shades).

Manifestation Forms: All ghosts have the ability to manifest to the living (appearing to, interacting with or harming them). Each Shade does so differently, however, for different Vitality costs.

Recommended Natures: Every Shade has a recommended list of Natures that best exemplify or complement it. Additionally, it offers characters and supporting characters who share Nature categories (through the Shade group) to better relate to one another. Storytellers and players are not limited to these choices, however, when choosing a specific Nature in relation to a Shade. A Poltergeist can be every bit the Martyr that a Banshee can. The selection is merely a recommendation.

Signature Character: The Signature Character is a model of the Shade (or Lament, as indicated later on), exemplifying their qualities best. They are also our fictional vehicles to help carry the **Orpheus** story along and potential supporting characters who can mentor your characters or provide them with help along the way. While they are the fictional focus of the **Orpheus** limited series, they should never be the saviors who outshine the player characters at every opportunity. The player characters are the heroes of this tale.

BANSHEE

I speak for myself. I speak for all of us.

And I will be heard, even if I must speak a word that will shatter you.

Banshees read the past, mediate the present and divine the future. They can use the emotions of others as a guide to the pains of yesterday, read them in the now to help ghosts break never-ending cycles of repetitive behavior, and foretell tomorrow — to an extent — by observing where these emotions will lead others around them. On their own, they're missionaries, mystics, healers, crusaders and adventurers. In a crucible, they're mediators, conciliators, analysts and sometimes the person who points everyone in the same direction and then pushes.

A Banshee's voice is a major factor in her existence; it allows her to vocalize her feelings to others and it gives her the ability to communicate and to share or relieve pain. Sometimes she uses her voice to console and to enlighten, finding the words to help others work past their pain and to resolve their problems. Sometimes they give vent to the agony and frustration around them, shrieking out a wail that would shatter the walls of Jericho.

In life, these characters are highly empathic (though not necessarily easy to get along with) and receptive to other people's dilemmas. Everyone talks to them about their problems

— whether they want to listen or not — or uses them as sounding-boards and advisors to resolve their quandaries. Banshees mediate conflicts, cut interpersonal Gordian knots and manage to give solid advice in most cases, because they always see every side of a situation. They are frequently eloquent, their empathy helping them find the right words for any necessity. Some might call them level-headed or centered, but this isn't necessarily the case; they may be as driven by their emotions, or as obsessive, as any other character. What they *are* is in tune with the human experience, recognizing the interplay of emotional currents in themselves and in those around them, and ultimately able to judge or voice those currents.

This is no guarantee of a peaceful life, or a happy one; a Banshee may find herself using her talents and abilities because she sees the need to do so (even when she would rather pursue her own interests). She may even feel her judgment is somehow voyeuristic or harsh when she comes to a conclusion about the emotions driving those around her, or when her perceptions give her more insight than she'd like into her next-door-neighbor's motivations. Banshees may understand themselves, but they don't necessarily like what they are. They do understand that struggle and

frustration that others feel, however, and have very probably felt it themselves.

Eventually they emerged from that

struggle, unbowed and unbeaten, and used their knowledge of it to their benefit. A Banshee may be a crisis counselor, a marketing supervisor managing his team into working together smoothly, the "mother hen" of the office always giving advice near the photocopier, or an artist with an uncompromising but accurate tongue.

Clothed in gauze, a Ban-

shee is left with her voice and her words as her strongest tools to affect the world around her, and with the same need to bring surcease to others that she may have, or had, in life. She can still perceive the emotions driving the dead — perhaps even more so than the living — and can assist drones caught in cycles of repetition, helping them

Banshees are far from perfect. They may grow bitter from judging others or prone to condemnation. Alternatively they might become slow in making decisions, constantly feeling that every side of the question must earn consideration, and that *any* opinion will be unjust to someone. Equally, they can give the emotions of others a higher importance than is strictly necessary or feel that a past trauma or a future complication is more important than a current crisis. Their compassion can draw them into giving aid where it is unwise to do

through understanding, compassion or manipulation.

so, or frankly dangerous; they may even refuse to recognize that they cannot, or should not, help some people.

Horrors: Wail, Forebode

Manifestation Forms: For zero **Vitality points**, a Banshee can cause her voice to be heard in whispers that flutter and batter those in the area from all directions; otherwise, the Banshee has no physical impact on the world and remains unseen except to those who can see spirits and projectors. She may speak normally, though her voice sounds drawn through great distances or echoes in whispers. Banshees with Spite ratings near, equal to or greater than their Vitality project their voices differently, their whispers giggly and high like those of children or dropping in octaves to sound possessed.

For **one Vitality point**, she appears as an apparition, her gauze partially translucent and torn in an almost stereotypical rendition of a floating ghost. The wisps of bright white gauze float and bob on ethereal winds, giving the Banshee an almost dream-like quality. If the Banshee has a high Spite rating (at least one dot under their Vitality), her gauze is even further tattered, her hair long and white, her eyes black like a shark's and her teeth likewise sharp. In either case all Attribute and Ability rolls are at halfstrength, rounded down to a minimum of one dot.

For two Vitality points, a Banshee appears as human, with full stats, speaking and interacting with her surroundings as though alive, though qualities of the Banshee seem "floaty" and light as if the Banshee is somehow immersed in water.

Base Vitality: 5
Base Spite: 0

Base Willpower: 3

Recommended Natures: Caregiver, Defender, Gallant, Martyr, Mediator, Penitent

HATE DENNISON

Katherine — Kate — Dennison might at any point have pointed to her life as an explanation for giving up. Her mother died in childbirth, and Kate nearly died with her. Her father's death when she was sixteen, at the hands of a casual burglar who knocked her out and left her for dead, wasn't enough to cost her her hold on life. Instead, it left her with a thirst to know what lay behind the physical.

Kate wants to find the truth about God, the afterlife, the universe, everything; she wants an answer to the world's pain.

Kate investigated shamanic traditions and underwent several near-death experiences while trying to achieve trance states, but the increasing risk of actual death made her change directions. She studied philosophy and religion at university with a ferocious drive. She earned her degree with honors and is now a teaching assistant at the same university.

Kate has never found gentle compassion in her character. She has the angry comprehension that comes from seeing the defects in the world around her all too clearly, and she knows her own flaws with equal bitterness. She abhors stupidity, detests blind obedience to regulations and has very little understanding of why anyone should voluntarily enslave himself or herself to another person.

This all comes down to one fundamental root; she hates waste. Waste of intelligence, waste of opportunity, waste of life. She does not tolerate these in her students, in her colleagues or in herself. The discovery of the amount of waste and pain that continues after death is a new target, a new problem that needs fixing, rather than something to repel her. She is not a pleasant person in the conventional sense; her manners range from dryly polite to sarcastic and vicious. While she has excellent perception and a talent for extracting people's problems from them, she's rarely particularly gentle in her efforts to help. She does try assisting others where she sees the need

for it, however, and combines the precision of a scalpel with the driving force of a train.

HAUNTERS

Hop in! It's time to get the hell outta Dodge!

Throughout history, cultures the world over have told tales of haunted places or cursed items. England has the Tower of London, and Long Island has its infamous Amityville house. Ancient Egypt gave birth to the cursed artifacts of King Tutankhamen's tomb while the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. is home to the ill-omened Hope Diamond. At the heart of all these and other such legends, if Orpheus research is to be believed, is the Haunter.

In life, future Haunters are typically rootless wanderers. They hear the call of the open road at a young age, and are quick to answer it. Drifters, runaways, sailors, commercial pilots, flight attendants, carnies and circus folk — all these and more might one day become Haunters under the right circumstances.

In general, the person who one day becomes a Haunter differs from his fellow nomads in a couple of ways. One is that he is never forced into this sort of life: He embraces it himself. People compelled to follow such a lifestyle through circumstances beyond their control and who long to lead a more settled life seldom, if ever, become Haunters. A Haunter is unique among his peers in that he always feels at home wherever he may roam. To the Haunter, each new town, new port and new destination is an adventure waiting to unfold. When a Haunter grows bored with his

current situation, it is time to

move on to the next big thing.

The second way the Haunter differs from other wanderers is that he seldom forms strong emotional bonds with other people. A Haunter may have tons of acquaintances, but only one or two close friends he cares deeply about. Instead of forming long-term interpersonal relationships with others, the Haunter reserves the majority of his affection for something besides his fellow human beings. It may be automobiles, a form of artistic expression, an institution or a government, but whatever it is, the Haunter loves this thing or concept more than he ever will another person.

Scientists with Orpheus Group theorize that it is this very ability to project the feelings human beings typically reserve for one another onto inanimate objects or abstract concepts in life that allows Haunters to exercise their most well-known ability in death... the ability to physically merge with inanimate objects and possess them. Haunters "empathize" with such objects in the way Skinriders do with human beings. Haunters feel more comfortable with the inanimate because it is more predictable than the human.

Some Orpheus scientists speculate that most Haunters suffered some form of abandonment or betrayal early in life, and it is the fear of another such incident that keeps them from ever forming intimate bonds with other people thereafter. These same scientists believe that Haunters, their nonchalant

demeanor notwithstanding, bottled up the resentment they felt about this initial betrayal and about their frustrated attempts to form close bonds with others. It is this anger, Orpheus researchers say, exploding to the surface that forms the basis of their somewhat less common Horror Witch's Nimbus. Regardless, these scientists are reluctant to share their pet theory with the Haunters themselves since they consider these spooks borderline sociopaths with anger-management issues. What the scientists have done is to suggest to upper management that Haunters be closely monitored and receive proper psychological counseling.

Thus far, issues of cost prohibit Orpheus from implementing these suggestions.

Horrors: Inhabit, Witch's Nimbus

Manifestation Forms: At no Vitality cost, Haunters may manifest only in reflective surfaces — mirrors, windows, bathwater and the like. In this

state, they appear as substantial as they

would in life, but only as a reflection. A soccer mom who sees a Haunter reflected in her SUV's rearview mirror, sitting between her two kids, and spins around to look will only see the two children, not the Haunter. In this form, Haunters are incapable of verbal communication, instead relying on gestures or messages written with the Inhabit Horror. Those touched by Spite ratings near to their Vitality are masked by shadows that seemingly scrabble over them for purchase, and their eyes, as windows to their souls, are empty sockets.

By spending one Vitality point, a

Haunter appears wet and mucous with a

caul clinging to his face and obscuring his features, looking much like a cross between the old Victorian photos of ghosts' ectoplasmic forms and the bed-sheet ghosts common on Halloween. In this form, all Attributes and Abilities for the purposes of rolls made for the Haunter are at half-strength, rounded down (to a minimum of one dot). Again, high Spite ratings can affect this form, and the caul bulges and moves as if with darkened tendrils pressing against its inner surface, almost like a grease-thin paper bag filled with worms.

Two Vitality allows the Haunter to appear essentially as he did in life, though a Haunter appears unhealthy if not outright anemic or jaundiced. The Haunter may now interact with his environment and those around him as though living. The Haunter now possesses all his normal Attributes and Abilities, as well as access to any of his Horrors.

Base Vitality: 5
Base Spite: 1
Base Willpower: 4

Recommended Natures: Dabbler, Explorer, Loner, Rebel, Socialite, Thrill-Seeker

HOYT MASTERSON

happy, if poor, childhood. His fondest memories are of puttering around in his daddy's garage as a boy, handing him tools and learning what made people's cars work. Even then, Hoyt had a fondness for cars. They were these magical shining machines of chrome and steel with deep throaty engines that rocketed them around the curving dirt roads near his home, leaving clouds of dust in their wake.

Born and raised in rural South Carolina, Hoyt Masterson enjoyed a

Unfortunately, such happiness was not to last. Hoyt's parents both died in a head-on collision with a drunk driver when he was only 12 years old. Hoyt himself nearly died, and it was as a result of his injuries that Hoyt first enjoyed a brush with the other side, suffering an out-of-body experience; his daddy told him it wasn't his time yet and sent Hoyt back.

Young and resilient, Hoyt quickly recovered from his injuries. Soon, there was talk of releasing him into foster care, but it was then that Hoyt's Uncle Luke, his daddy's brother, offered to take him in. Luke never had time for marriage, but as he grew older, he found he wanted someone to carry on his life's work. Luke, it turned out, was one of the finest wheelmen in North America, having graduated from running moonshine to running drugs for a Colombian cartel. And with Luke's drug money greasing the right palms, Luke soon had himself a protégé.

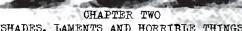
The life of a driver might not have been what Hoyt himself would have chosen, but he took to it like a duck to water. Before he could legally drive, the teen was already doing jobs for his uncle. He had natural talent, and under his uncle's tutelage, Hoyt became the premier drug runner for the cartel in the southern United States.

Still, if there is one constant in life, it's change: Once again, Hoyt's fortunes shifted during an auto accident. While fleeing police in a high-speed chase, Hoyt flipped the Porsche he was driving, which led to his capture and, later, to a conviction and 10-year sentence for drug trafficking. The time in prison, especially the first year spent in traction, gave the young man time to think. Maybe it was time to quit this life and clean up his act. Getting stabbed in the prison's laundry room by a fellow inmate and seeing his father's disappointed ghost clinched it.

After getting out early for good behavior, Hoyt tried avoiding his uncle's attempts to bring his nephew back into the fold. He searched for straight employment, but it was impossible for an ex-con like himself to find a job, especially since his only appreciable skill was driving real fast.

Hoyt was ready to give up when he heard about Orpheus Group. Attending an interview on a lark, Hoyt was surprised when Orpheus not only took his tales of astral travels seriously but actually hired him. Since joining, Hoyt's familiarity with and affinity for machines have turned him into the group's top Haunter. As much to his surprise as everyone else's, Hoyt finds himself a diligent employee, popular with both staff and clients.

Unfortunately, Hoyt's uncle — and his employers — know of the Haunter's unique talents. It may be only a matter of time before Hoyt's new life and his old collide — and Hoyt's not certain he can walk away from that accident.



POLTERGEIST

If you make me ask you again, I'm going to ask you very, very hard.

A staple of the classic ghost story is the angry spirit, hurtling its rage at the living in an otherworldly attempt to express its anguish and frustration in the only way it can. In some cases, the furious ghost is tied to a particular place or object in life, and is subsequently doomed to haunt the area for eternity, insolently lashing out at the living souls who mock its pain by their very presence. In other cases, this sort of restless spirit aims to disrupt the peace and security of the living to find or regain

acknowledgment. The only fulfillment (or even peace) such a ghost knows is in its power to make believers of the living; to wit, it stretches its sorrowful will across the boundary, forcing others to recognize its existence... and its pain. German folklore called this type of spirit a "poltergeist," or "noisy ghost."

In the world of Orpheus Group, where inner nature and inborn proclivity are everything when it comes to determining what sort of projector or spirit a given person will make, Poltergeists embody the frustrated and angry mind-set of the classic ghost. To a one, each would-be Poltergeist finds almost maddening frustration at or with the world, and upon stepping from his or her body, uses these powerful frustrations like a blunt force, hurling objects around. Unlike the despair-addled spirits of German folklore, however, these characters have greater fine control and can manipulate objects with a range of proficiency, from writing with a pen to throwing a room into turmoil with a whirlwind of kitchen implements.

While life may be a frustrating endeavor to all such people, the difference and variety comes in how each one handles and expresses that frustration. To this extent, Poltergeists are perhaps even more tied to their Nature than other Shades, because their Nature is largely what determines how they react to life. Some characters become lost, unable to find a suitable funnel for their yearning and rage. These people tend to either dissociate from society or regress from it, thus leading to the preponderance of Bumpkin, Child and Rogue Natures in the Shade. Some cope via intellectual release, constantly criticizing the

world and bellyaching about their frustrations to any and all who will listen, and often forcing their vitriol upon those who won't. Poltergeists become empowered or embittered by their experiences, oftentimes both, and they learn to harness the power of the sudden outbursts they feel welling up within themselves when everything becomes too much. Such characters may often seem calm, powerless or meek one moment and explode into an intense rage the next.

Horrors: Helter Skelter, Congeal

Manifestation Forms: The aver-

age Poltergeist (if there is such a

thing) manifests in the way one might associate with the ethos of the sobriquet "poltergeist."

These characters impose their powerful essences on the living world, and in so doing, manipulate the things of the living by sheer will alone. With zero Vitality point expenditure, Poltergeists manifest by exerting control over objects in the area and exploiting

them to their own ends (for a

maximum of one dot in Strength

and Dexterity). This is typically most

effective when manipulating objects as means of communication, like the pointer on a Ouija board, or by using chalk to scratch words on stone. In the Digital Age, enterprising ghosts and projectors make use of nearby computers to speak with the living. Otherwise, Poltergeists remain intangible, invisible and inaudible. With a high Spite rating (essentially a rating almost on par with starting Vitality), the words being written or indicated bleed for the duration of a scene before the gauze-blood evaporates with no incriminating evidence left behind.

For **one Vitality point**, the Poltergeist pulls nearby objects together to form a crude body. Even though it may look weak, this collective form has the same strength as any other one-Vitality manifestation and may affect the world in much the same fashion: at half the ghost's or projector's own Attribute and Ability scores. Any damage against the objects, however, forces the manifesting Poltergeist to make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7); if he fails, the body is scattered and the Poltergeist is

incorporeal again. With high Spite ratings, the objects spin around as though trapped in a vortex or whirlwind.

For two Vitality points, Poltergeists materialize fully formed, just like any other Shade. The difference is that the Poltergeist possesses a frenetic, angry energy about him. He may not mean to, but there's a look of bottled rage to their eyes

and in the furrow of the eyebrows. At best, the Poltergeist appears "intense," at worst, homicidal.

Base Vitality: 5

Base Spite: 2

Base Willpower: 5

Recommended Natures: Bravo, Bumpkin, Child, Critic, Judge, Masochist, Perfectionist, Rogue

BEN COTTON

Ben Cotton was born in Gallipoli, Ohio, when his mother, Melissa, was a teen under the thumb of her bible-thumping father, Edgar Cotton. Melissa bore the ultimate shame of having had premarital sex, but since it was against the bible to abort the child, Edgar kept Melissa a prisoner in his home until the child came to term. The labor terrified Melissa even further, for she hid the child's father: She couldn't bear to admit that the father was not white, fearing—knowing—Edgar would have killed her for having a "mud baby."

Melissa managed to escape to a friend's house and brought Ben into the world there. She then vanished, escaping her father and her own duties as mother. Stuck with a newborn, Melissa's friend did the only thing she believed she could, and gave Ben to a local orphanage under the care of nuns.

Ben was a sickly infant with a constant need

for supervision, and thus did not meet with approval from potential couples looking for "that perfect child." He nearly died over the first several years of his life before his immune system finally proved strong enough, and he grew up in the orphanage system. Although he still

had some health problems, Ben protected himself by becoming a bully to the weaker children, which toughened him up while making him ever-more belligerent. His mind twisted with anger at the perceived inequities of his plight, until one day, his rage got the better of him and he went after a rival's throat, crushing the boy's windpipe under

> his thumbs. That evening, the terrified sisters agreed to turn him over to the state, where he was transferred to juvenile hall.

> > During his four years as a ward of the state, Ben survived countless cafeteria brawls and several actual attempts on his life. By the time he was released at the age of 18, he had bought himself a one-way ticket to a life of petty but organized crime. Once free, Ben found that the streets put his survival skills to the test. After five years of breaking legs and cheating odds, Ben's attitude earned him several powerful rivals in his own organization — rivals who wanted him dead. Following a nearly successful attempt on his life, Ben decided to cut his losses and leave town for good. He found Orpheus Group.

Standing over six feet in height, Ben is powerfully built and utterly ambiguous, ethnically speaking, a fact that he takes advantage whenever possible. Ben is also bald and frequently wears sunglasses, even while indoors (his eyes are unusually pale for someone of his heritage). He removes them on rare occasions when he elects to make his point without violence, or as a prelude

to such behavior.



SKINRIDER

You're fighting yourself now. I think it's a fight you'll lose.

In life and death, Skinriders obsess about control, but control can take many forms. The bullying gangster, the inspiring teacher, the obstinate bureaucrat and the charismatic military commander all show different ways in which a person might impose his will on others. Even the lone do-it-yourselfer can show a desire for control through his refusal to trust in the abilities or good faith of others. A Skinrider, however, does not have to trust a mortal to do the job: He can become the mortal and direct another's body like a master horseman controls a steed.

Such domination often turns malevolent. Some people rule others through fear, greed or deceit as a way to exploit them. Some potential Skinriders see people as pawns to direct, victims to bully or obstacles to crush. Milder forms of domination can still be terribly egotistical. The clerk who enforces every petty regulation, the business executive who thinks a title and a few management books make him the office messiah or the know-it-all who gives you his opinion whether you want it or not are all examples.

Some potential Skinriders genuinely seek to improve other people, though. The priest or counselor who drives others to self-knowledge; or the drill sergeant who turns boys into men, are just as controlling as any mafia don or guilt-tripping mother. Potential Skinriders all show an undeniable knack for leadership, even if some of them express it in vicious, subtle or downright peculiar ways.

As ghosts and projectors, such people no longer need physical threats, clever words or potent symbols to manipulate others. A Skinrider can step into a person's body and make them puppets to his personality. That aspect of overpowering will also finds expression in the second Horror associated with this Shade. Through Juggernaut, a Skinrider can display prodigious strength, speed or resistance to harm. The Skinrider simply doesn't accept that an object won't move, that some force can harm him or that he doesn't have time to do something, any more than he accepts that mortals will disobey. Ghosts and projectors exist as creatures of will... and Skinriders have a lot of will.

Horrors: Puppetry, Juggernaut

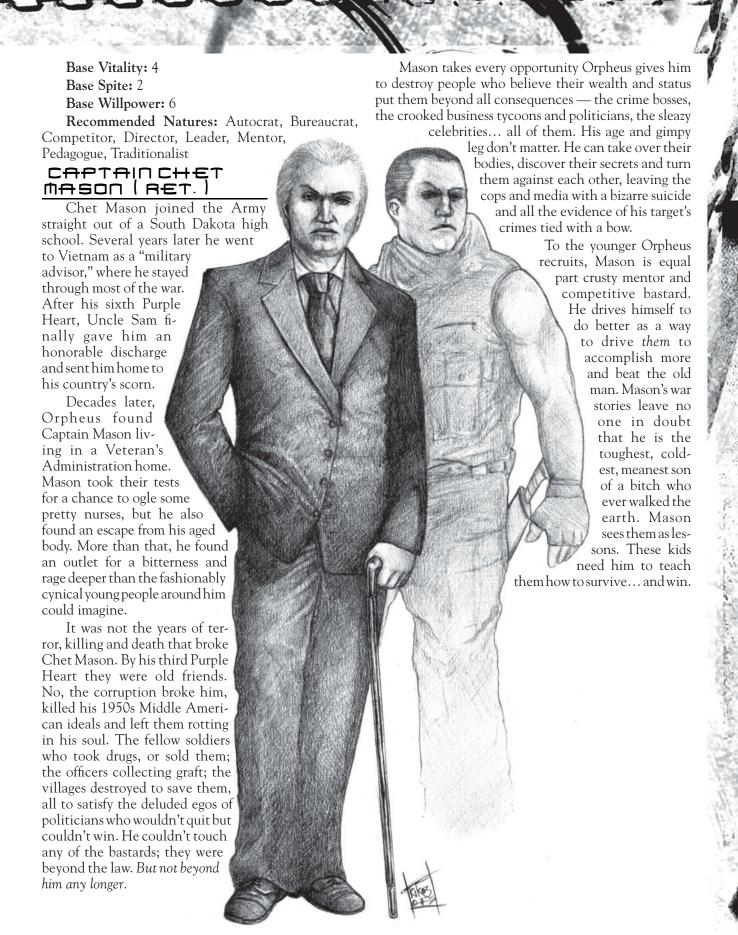
Manifestation Forms: At zero Vitality point expenditure, Skinriders manifest only by controlling the living. A Skinrider can touch a mortal and make him speak the spook's words, granting the character full speech. A Skinrider can also embody by proxy in the same fashion, using a mortal's body to affect the physical world in brief and clumsy ways. Think of it as partial possession. Actions performed through borrowed flesh have a maximum duration of one turn, and the ghost/projector cannot exert force

greater than Strength 1, at an agility of Dexterity 1. Those Skinriders touched with a high Spite rating (on the cusp of overtaking their Vitality) make their hosts appear demonically possessed. The host's eyes become white, his skin appears cracked, his hair goes wild and his voice becomes otherworldly—essentially all the physical cues from the *Exorcist* sans projectile yomiting.

By expending one Vitality point, the Skinrider materializes a body of his own, a translucent phantom of cobwebs and fog strung with silver threads, much akin to a humanoid ball of glowing twine.

This tissue of gauze has effective Attributes and Abilities at half-value (to a minimum of 1 dot). The plasm body accurately portrays the ghost's or projecting entity's self-image, but no one could mistake it for a living person. With a high Spite rating, however, the threads and cobwebs blacken to oily slickness, and shadow-like veins grow from cancerous splotches on the Skinrider's body.

Expending **two Vitality points** creates a body that appears fully human, with the character's full Attributes. Again, though, this is the spook's self-image. For projectors, this might not match the character's physical body in every detail. The Skinrider's "veins" and "arteries" are more visible however, the skin somehow thinner... more brittle. Both the candy floss-phantom and solid manifestations last a full scene before dissolving, unless the Skinrider chooses to abandon them earlier.



WISPS

Just a little farther, now ... oops! Watch that first step!

In classic legend, the will-o'-the-wisp (also called jack-o'-lantern or faerie light) was a malevolent spirit who led hapless travelers to their doom by creating tiny, compelling lights before leading people into swamps or off cliffs. Wisp characters, when accused of similar tendencies, manage a credible impersonation of shock but certainly remember the idea for later use.

Wisps, in life, were social animals. Whether the life of the party or a social predator like a con artist, a Wisp feels most comfortable around other people. Some are jokers and bon vivants, always attempting to lighten the mood with an endless string of wry witticisms, sight gags, dirty anecdotes, movie quotes or whatever else they feel their audience would enjoy. Others are malicious, almost sociopathic individuals who seduce, intimidate and cajole, all for the purpose of gaining power

— even momentarily — over another person without resorting to force. Even these unpleasant sorts are easy to get along with, however. They make it easy to like them, adapting their behavior to whatever the standard seems to be. The old adage that you can survive on charm for 15 minutes, after which you'd better know something does not hold true for Wisps — they can rely on charm indefinitely.

Some Wisps see their role as that of a jester or clown; if everyone is too serious all the time, they forget why they do anything and slip into drudgery. These are the folks who play pranks at the office and watch cartoons into adulthood — they refuse, no matter what folks tell them, to grow up. Unfortunately, Wisps can take this role of the contrary to dangerous extremes. Many find themselves losing friends after a particular prank goes too far, and they are bewildered by the sudden change in climate — after all, they laughed at all the *other* tricks.

Fortunately, most Wisps are also superb social manipulators, capable of wriggling out of any bad joke or faux pas. A self-deprecating remark and a disarming smile, and the party continues, no one worse for the wear. This skill is especially useful for those socialites who make their living (or at least fun) landing in trouble; it's one thing to seduce a mob boss' youngest daughter, but quite another for him to hand you the car keys for a second date. Wisps might find employment on one side of the law as comedians, magicians, lawyers and public

relations experts. On the other side, however, many find work as scam artists, hustlers and dealers.

Of course, all of this changes when a Wisp enters the afterlife. Their beguiling tendencies take on literal form, and the Wisp becomes capable of literally leading people around by the nose. Whereas a Wisp's force of personality was strong in life, in death it becomes powerful enough to seduce both the living and the breathing-challenged, forcing people to follow the his glow even unto their demise — just like in the legends. Likewise, a Wisp's social agility takes on a more tangible aspect, enabling him to disappear and reappear some distance away. Wisp ghosts and projectors often adopt the roles of thieves and spies, simply because their Horrors allow them just the right mix of power over both living and dead witnesses

for this sort of work. In his crucible, however, a Wisp is rarely the leader but often is second-in-command, pointing out the flaws in the group's plans and keeping all on their toes.

Horrors: *Unearthly Repose*, Storm-Wending

Manifestation Forms:
At zero Vitality points, the Wisp's basic manifestation is a soft glow, usually white or yellow (although Wisps with Spite ratings nearly equal to or greater than their Vitality tend more toward red or violet). The glow is not humanoid in shape; an observer who saw both the ghost's gauze and the glow would see a ball of light roughly centered over the Wisp's abdomen. A living observer sees only a faint ball of

(usually very beguiling) light, until the Wisp decides to invest more of himself in the manifestation. In this form, the Wisp is completely mute, but can affect physical objects in slight ways (flicking light switches, fogging up windows, etc).

With some additional effort (at one Vitality point expenditure) the Wisp looks like a blurry rendition of her true appearance. The ghost or projecting entity appears to the living as a recognizable, humanoid form, but her features slur and run together as though being viewed through a rain-lashed window. Some Wisps, particularly

through a rain-lashed window. Some Wisps, particularly those with high Spite ratings, take on darker shades in this form and resemble old, black and white photographs. Finally, by exerting himself, the Wisp can appear as

Finally, by exerting himself, the Wisp can appear as a human being, manifesting completely. This **two point Vitality** expenditure renders Wisps nearly indistinguish-

able from their normal, living forms, save the fact that they glimmer with an inner light. Most such Wisps have beatific smiles — or devilish grins, depending on their general temperament — a light, dextrous touch and obvious grace. Since Horrors are usable in this form (and since Wisps tend to be showy), they often glow with low-level Unearthly Repose (see p. 113).

Base Vitality: 4
Base Spite: 0
Base Willpower: 4

Recommended Natures: Bon Vivant, Child, Conniver, Rake, Riddler, Trickster

JOHN "BLINK" CARRUTHERS

John Carruthers was a stage magician. In his youth, he had dreams of Vegas, TV specials, and so forth. He performed at kids' parties and, of course, whenever family gathered together, everybody tugged at his sleeves and begged him for tricks. He had a rude awakening, however, when he actually tried doing stage

illusion professionally.

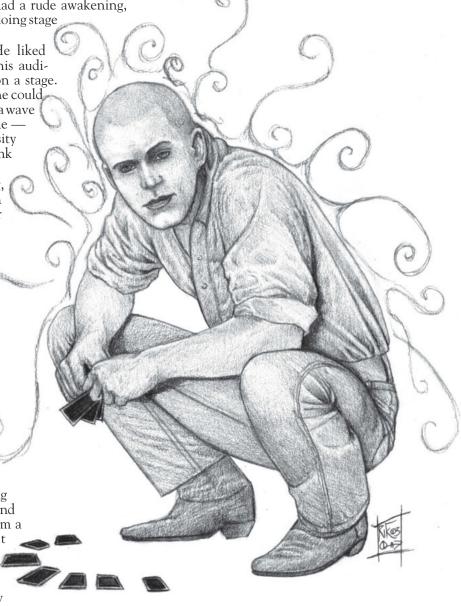
John was an entertainer. He liked being close and personal with his audience, rather than a mile away on a stage. His specialty was slight of hand; he could make billiard balls disappear with a wave and a smile. In fact, his nickname — "Blink" — came from his propensity for anything he was holding to blink in and out of visibility.

Blink didn't know a thing, though, about the high-tech "magic" that is all but required for modern illusionists. Disheartened, he opened his own magic shop at the age of 25 and bitterly resigned himself to the role of amateur magician for life.

At the age of 26, Blink was diagnosed with cancer. Suddenly his life didn't seem so bad. He met his treatment bravely, but his debts mounted, forcing him to sell his shop. His family supported him as best they could, but he knew the money wouldn't last and was adamant his loved ones wouldn't fall to bankruptcy trying to pay for his medical bills. And then, Blink received an offer from a strange group called Orpheus. It seemed folks like him — pushed to the brink of death by illness or circumstances—were exactly what they needed. Blink knew

enough about misdirection to recognize that something else was happening, but in the wake of hearing "complete medical coverage," he signed on.

Blink is a performer, and therefore is often the one who makes contact with blips and drones for his crucible. He's a funny guy, used to being in control of a crowd, and can defuse volatile situations with a quick joke and gesture. When matters really spiral out of control, however, he can also provide an escape route via Storm-Wending. Blink does not fancy himself a combatant — like any stage magician, he needs to be in control too much to be at all comfortable in the fluid situation that is battle.



LAMENTS

Not everyone reaches out to or interacts with the unseen the same way. Laments are like a species of character, determining how one becomes a ghost or projecting entity, and how one interacts with other spooks. These definitions are not absolute, however, and over the course of a chronicle, a character can change Laments within a finite set of permutations.

There are two main categories of Laments: projectors and ghosts. Projectors are living people touched by death so often that it marks their souls. They carry death with them, like battle-wound scars as testament to its harrowing graze. Life is a choice for them, a state of being. Death is another choice, equally valid. They have such strong ties to the afterlife that they can project their souls from their bodies as ghosts, hence the name "projectors."

Projectors have the best of both worlds. They can leave the living and, if matters become too rough for them in the unseen, return to the safety of their bodies. Projectors, however, don't operate without risk. When a projector leaves her body, the vacant flesh is vulnerable to restless Spectres seeking a host. A Spectre or other lost soul may inhabit the body while the soul travels. If a projector returns to a possessed body, she must force out the Spectre. Another danger is mundane enemies attacking an abandoned body, potentially killing a projector while she's "absent." For this reason, most projectors safeguard their bodies before traveling.

There are two sub-types of projectors: Skimmers and sleepers. Skimmers may leave their body at will, shifting their souls between life and death with minimal effort. It becomes a simple act of will for a skimmer to project. Sleepers, however, may project only while in a cryogenic unit called a cradle, where they experience death while suspending necrosis. They rely heavily on artificial support to explore death and return to their bodies when others revive them. Orpheus and other such organizations provide the support technology needed for sleepers to project.

Ghosts constitute the second type of Lament. Quite simply, ghosts are dead and no longer encumbered by the demands of a body. Ghosts haunt the living, often invisibly, and often isolated from others of their kind... but not always. Many try to remain involved in living events, watching and attempting to manipulate matters. Because they are truly dead, ghosts cannot escape the dangers of the afterlife like projectors. They cannot elude supernatural enemies by fleeing to their bodies.

As with projectors, there are two sub-types of ghosts. Spirits fit the classic definition of ghosts existing among the living. Memories of their lives bind them to the physical world. These souls keep aspects of their personality, and may possess knowledge and skills beyond those of normal humans. Hues are less vibrant ghosts, glowing with washed out colors. All hues are former pigment users who underwent enough near-death experiences to permanently alter them. A hue may call upon her dark side to aid her.

During the course of a character's life (and death), she may change Laments. A person could conceivably play a sleeper, but gain enough control over her projection to become a skimmer. Once she passes away, she will likely remain involved with her living friends as a ghost, whether as a spirit or hue. Once a projector becomes a ghost, however, she can't go back.

LAMENT BREAKDOWN

The sections detailing the breakdown of Laments are as follows: Advantages: Beyond the general explanation of the Lament, what advantages does playing a character of this "species" offer?

Disadvantages: This Lament's negative aspects that will hinder a character of this "species."

Signature Character: The supporting character who best exemplifies this Lament's core nature. Like the Shade's signature personas, these are fictional heroes who may interact with a troupe, but they are not meant to overshadow the characters.



LAMENT: SKIMMER

How quickly can I get started? Go out that door, lock it behind you and I'll still beat you down the stairs.

Skimmers are masters of the esoteric art of soul projection. With minimal preparation, a skimmer can cast her soul free of her body, essentially becoming a spook at will. The skimmer's flesh remains behind, an empty husk kept alive by energy trickling back through the silver cord connecting soul to flesh (the term "silver cord" has been held over from mystical tradition, even though this connector is both invisible and intangible). Many skimmers develop an unusual relationship with their physical bodies once they can leave at will, either reveling in physical sensation or lavish sartorial display when "in residence," or conversely spurning the flesh to concentrate on the life of the mind, becoming ascetic or just plain sloppy.

Orpheus can't predict who will become a skimmer. Some make the grade by being fast on their feet; some bull through on sheer determination; still others seemingly blunder into the realm of the dead every single time. Only two generalities seem to hold true: One, the more NDEs the better, and two, the projector must be comfortable with taking substantial risks.

Skimmers begin training with a strict regimen that includes meditation techniques and drugs that elicit a sense of disassociation from the physical body. Under the watchful eye of Orpheus staff, the would-be skimmer eventually finds herself at the border between life and death—and learns to cross that boundary without suffering physical harm. With long, grueling practice, the skimmer learns to focus her consciousness, achieving the mental state necessary to slip free of her body within seconds. Not every new prospect manages this feat, of course; more than a few agents began skimmer training, "failed," and moved on to the sleeper tanks, creating some tension between the two types of projectors.

Although skimmers can project at will, Orpheus prefers to rotate such agents to avoid prolonged stress on their body (due to ripcording or other such damage). As such, skimmers usually follow a two-weeks-on, one-week-off cycle, wherein the week off is strictly paperwork or desktop investigation (essentially anything not involving projecting)

volving projecting).

Advantages: A skimmer can project her soul from her body after one turn of concentration *if* she possesses the Skill Meditation (otherwise, projecting requires one minute). Regardless she may then travel, on foot or in a vehicle, as far from her body as she wishes. To return, she may travel back, or, by simply willing it, snap back across any distance in a single turn. The latter method, called ripcording, is tiring and damages the body's

nervous system from the sudden surge of activity. It always inflicts one automatic level of bashing damage. When resting and in her body, the skimmer regains spent Vitality at the rate of one point per hour of rest, up to a maximum of her starting Vitality.

Disadvantages: The skimmer takes risks whenever leaving her body. She must spend one Vitality point every hour she is away from her flesh to maintain its autonomic functions (breathing, heart rate, etc.). Without that Vitality, her body begins dying, taking one point of bashing damage every hour. The silver cord also shunts

any damage directed at the skimmer's soul directly to her body, inflicting it as bashing damage regardless of the type of damage successfully dealt. The skimmer can attempt to soak this trauma using her Stamina rating (difficulty 5 instead

of 6). If the skim-

mer's body dies while her soul is projecting, she becomes a ghost.

SIGNATURE CHARACTER: 20E VITT

Zoë Vitt was a daredevil. After years of paying her dues (serving as a body double for timid actresses, performing at county fairs and auto racing events, even undertaking car theft when money was tight), she became a minor celebrity, with a name to play into a lifetime of Vegas shows. That wasn't enough, however. She longed for the days when Evel Knievel could tour like a rock star and perform live on primetime television. So, Zoë worked on showier and more dangerous tricks.

Orpheus Group paid Zoë a visit in the hospital (her fifth admission in under two years) after a rough bungee cutaway landing. Seeing a chance for a new career, one without an established old boys network, Zoë came aboard. The focus required of skimmers came naturally after stunt work. Her quick wits and personable nature proved assets dealing with both the living and the dead, and her drive to be at the top of her field kept her going even when the going was tough (or worse, boring).

Zoë's nature pulled her to the Poltergeist Shade. She isn't out-and-out angry — she fights back rather than allow perceived injustices to fester. Zoë's cheerfully

> wild side is just as happy to send objects zinging through the air, however, so she's quite capable of getting the job done.

CHAPTER TWO

LAMENT: SLEEPER

No, it's not the little death, it's the gigantic death.
We just don't get quite as close as we could.

Sleepers receive the same sort of training that skimmers receive but lack the key physical, psychological or spiritual trait enabling skimmers to project more-or-less at will. Instead, sleepers enter special chambers reminiscent of the earliest cryogenic tanks that Orpheus used to preserve its clients in a state of near-death. Orpheus technicians replace his blood with a serum that maintains the organs' health even as they ought naturally to decay and atrophy and reduce the sleeper's core temperature to around minus 80°F. Orpheus consultants refer to this process as "flatlining."

Once flatlined, the sleeper can project just as a skimmer does, and acts in most ways as does a ghost. His soul is lightly tethered to his body, though unlike a skimmer, he is in no danger of ghostly damage pushing its way out to his body.

Orpheus discourages its consultants from flatlining again too soon after recovery. The near-death and resuscitation processes are extremely hard on a sleeper's body and soul. Orpheus gives its agents at least two weeks' "beach" between flatlined assignments. Orpheus' psychologists see a greatly reduced incidence of both mental and physical illness among agents who take at least two weeks off, and beach is now mandatory corporate policy. Similarly, Orpheus doesn't keep its consultants flatlined for more than a few weeks at a time, lest they suffer

Sleepers' activities aren't always publicized, because they are not always the kinds of things for which Orpheus wants to be known. Orpheus uses sleepers for its more ethically and legally questionable tasks — including some things currently legal only by dint of there being no body of law advanced enough to anticipate ghostly activity.

permanent physical or mental harm.

Advantages: Sleepers do not need to spend Vitality to project or to stay in the projected state. Additionally, a sleeper can voluntarily shunt Spite points from his ghostform and into his somnolent body, protecting himself from the ravages of that malignant energy for a time. While this ability means sleepers are less likely to be overwhelmed by Spite, it is not without a price. For each temporary Spite point channeled in this fashion, the sleeper's body suffers one level of bashing damage (which he cannot soak) from the presence of "spiritual toxins," punishment that the character cannot heal until he emerges from cryo-sleep. Outside of this channeling, projecting sleepers do not suffer health level damage; almost all damage applied shreds gauze as if the sleeper were a true ghost.

As for the channeled Spite points, once the character emerges from cryo-sleep, the Spite persists as wounds. It does not initially contribute to the character's Spite points (or increase the Spite rating). Instead, the rehabilitation process to heal the sleeper's body and mind enables him to drain himself of one Spite point per day as a result of healing the injuries at the same time. Should the sleeper project again while still encumbered with physical injuries brought about through spiritual impurities, the remaining Spite points immediately convert over to the character's overall Spite pool (thus incurring the

possibility that a character's Spite rating will also increase).

Example: Michael decides to drain a ghost of Vitality and gains three Spite points. He shunts the three Spite into his body, which is far away, accruing three automatic health levels of bashing damage (no soak allowed). Orpheus brings him out of flatline, his condition at Injured. Michael meditates and heals for a day, eliminating one Spite point from his body and bringing him up to Hurt. Unfortunately, an emergency forces Michael back under, stopping him from healing the remaining two levels, which means he remains at Hurt, and the two Spite points are added to his Spite pool.

Disadvantages: A sleeper cannot project at will or in a hurry. He must enter a cryogenic cradle and be chemically flatlined. This process takes about five hours. Along the same lines, the sleeper cannot re-enter his body until the unit warms his body back to living temperature and replaces the stasis fluids with blood. Ad-

ditionally, while in the cryosleep state the body cannot recover Vitality; once a sleeper is back in his body and awake, he recoups Vitality at a point an hour. The projecting sleeper recovers lost energies as would any other ghost: slowly.

SIGNATURE CHARACTER: TOM HAYES

Tom Hayes' cerebral tumor destroyed his life. His wife, unable to live with the knowledge that her husband had just a few months to live, turned to pills and alcohol before killing herself. The architecture firm he'd worked for — where just a few months earlier he'd been up for a partnership — decided that his constant blackouts increased their collective health insurance premiums too much and cut him loose. His kids went to his wife's parents, and subsequently into state custody... or something like that. Tom doesn't remember for sure anymore.

All the doctors gave him six months to live. That was three years ago. Tom's series of near-death experiences as the cancer spread led Project Echo to his door. They knew why he was blacking outs, and even provided him a reason that this so-called tumor was so tenacious: It was the result of a Spectre haunting the family and burdening them with misery. It was keeping the tumor active, wreaking havoc with the children's lives and even driving Jasmine, his wife, to overdose. After giving Tom a description of their own goals and aims, Orpheus offered to help eliminate his Spectre problem. Tom was skeptical until they described the salary and commensurate life insurance policy, which Project Echo was prepared to offer without a physical exam.

For Tom, it seemed that the cancer went into remission just a few weeks after he accepted a position as an Investigative Consultant with Orpheus. He never could get the hang of the yoga and skimmer-style projection, so he's settled for life as a sleeper. The regular flatlining he goes through definitely helped retard his cancer's progress, and he's perfectly happy about that. Tom doesn't so much care about the fine money Orpheus pays him, but he thinks he can find his wife among the ghosts of this world.

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LAMENT: SPIRIT

You can't kill something that's already dead.

Spirits are the restless dead that remain behind when people's living shells pass on. They come from all walks of life and died in hundreds of different ways, leaving Orpheus with little clue about why some individuals become spirits upon death while others don't. Orpheus believes that spirits constitute a random cross-section of individuals possessed of unusually strong wills, personal ambitions or emotional attachments in their lives. Something about their psychological makeup tethered them to life more cohesively than others, even though dying weakened their luminance or even willpower.

While most spirits have not undergone multiple near-death experiences, those with high Vitality were exposed to repeated threats in life. Somehow, the repeated brushes with lethal situations strengthened their soul's connection with this world, imbuing them with stronger presence in the hereafter. Spirit characters fall into this latter category.

Unlike hues, spirit characters are not "anchored" to this existence in the same fashion as other spooks. Certainly, personal desires keep them here, but destroying their tethers does not cause them to ascend. Orpheus researchers believe that high Vitality spirits cansimply leave this plane of existence as a willed sort of suicide, and meet their final reward. Some aspect of self-preservation, however, makes this sacrifice difficult.

Orpheus considers spirits prize agents.
Because they no longer exist legally, they are the perfect operatives to carry out Orpheus' more illegal activities. Orpheus puts special effort into teaching spirit agents the arts of observation, data gathering and negotiation with other spirits. Less publicized are programs training spirits in terrorism and assassination.

Advantages: Spirit characters possess an additional five freebie points that their players spend during character creation. These points become available even if the character changes Lament in mid-chronicle (since he loses the advantages and disadvantages of any previous Lament). It is recommended these points be spent on additional Horrors or in raising the character's Willpower ratings. This represents either the spirit's strong connection to his ghostly state, or the spiritual energy and strength of will anchoring him to this plane.

Disadvantages: All spirits possess a malignant counterpart, a Specter that exists as a negative reflection of the character's psychological makeup. This bleak reflection of the character exists because spirits are powerful reflections of idand ego. They are embodiments of their own force of personality and are will personified. Thus, their Spite holds equal sway in determining the nature of their being. That said, ghosts with a starting Vitality of five or lower are never cognizant enough of themselves to realize they have a counterpart somewhere in the world. Spirits —including characters, regardless their starting Vitality — with a starting Vitality

of six or greater, however, sense their counterparts when within the same city (in terms of general directions: north, south, etc.). The sense grows stronger within a couple of miles of each other ("He's in that

building" or "he's on that block."), enough to allow both character and doppelganger to track one another down to the foot when within a mile of each other. The doppelganger is as skilled and strong as the character, using the same Horrors and manifestation forms, drawing upon Spite instead of Vitality and even wielding the character's Stains without drawback. For all intents and purpose, this cruel reflection is the character, a mirror in Traits. The doppelganger's purpose, however, is to destroy the spirit's former life or current existence. It attacks, tortures and haunts family members and friends, or destroys that which the character holds dear. Each successful attack (a killing, grievous injury,

driving a target mad or destroying it) in this manner automatically saddles the spirit with a Spite point to reflect the loss, alienation or frustration caused by the attack. The spirit immediately and innately understands the source of the Spite increase.

Spirits can track down and destroy the doppelganger, but the creature always returns after [20 - Spite rating] weeks. As long as the spirit has one Spite rating, the twin exists, and destroying the twin will not eliminate the Spite point damage it incurs.

SIGNATURE CHARACTER: ANNIE HARPER

Annie Harper was an adventurous child, the daughter of anthropologists who encouraged her intellectual curiosity and enthusiasm. Annie and her two brothers spent their lives accompanying their parents around the globe. By the time Annie was ten, she could speak nearly a dozen languages and was familiar with the cultures of six continents. This

lifestyle brought with much danger, however, both natural and man-made. Having gone through several near-death experiences as the result of her encounters with poisonous flora and fauna, Annie barely survived an Iraqi chemical weapons attack on a Kurdish village. Her brothers were not so lucky.

Atage 16, Anniereturned to the United States. After earning her Masters in anthropology from Stanford, she was contacted by the newly formed Orpheus, which needed a specialist to investigate out-of-body projection and near-death experiences among other cultures. Through her work, the fledgling organization quickly amassed a library of data from around the world.

Unfortunately, Annie ran afoul of heroin dealers and was murdered in Rangoon. Finding herself as a spirit, Annie managed to return home only after her parents claimed her body. After a year of trying to get a handle on her new situation, Annie recontacted Orpheus.

Today, Annie continues to work for Orpheus as a field researcher. She is quick-witted and almost fearless, as well as a committed realist untouched by optimistic idealism or pessimistic cynicism. Orpheus has been unable to categorize Annie, since she demonstrates several abilities they've yet to encounter in any other ghost or projector.

LAMENT: HUE

Remember in Beetlejuice when Keaton's face burst open and it had all those tentacles and teeth? No? Here, let me show you.

Trapped in shadow, hues have pale and faint souls flickering with washed out colors. Hue characters still shine brighter than many ghosts, but they can feel themselves fading and know they should be more than what they are. Hues struggle constantly to maintain

their essence, never quite reaching an inward maximum potential that they feel remains untapped within themselves. The glass is half-empty, by their assessment, because there are holes stopping the hue from filling it up all the way.

Like spirits, people who become hues suffer multiple near death experiences before they pass away. One other thing besides the NDEs ties hues together, however: pigment. All hues tried pigment in their lives, and though many were addicts, a few tried the drug just once. In most cases, the black heroin overwhelmed them, leading to their deaths. Some hues still feel the scratchy craving in the afterlife, but many want revenge on the drug makers; they blame pigment for their shattered state. Others simply despair, watching the living commit the same mistakes they did.

For hues, existing is a matter of attitude. Yes, most hues know that they could give up, spend the afterlife in sorrow and give in to the darkness, blah, blah. They could, but they have different ideas. Despite everything that's screwed up, they've survived. Hues must also face the dark sides of their souls up close and personal, and best it. Intimacy with the worst aspects of their natures allows hues to make pacts or deals with their dark sides through their actions. These hues don't give up. They don't panic when things go wrong. If a dark twisted monstrosity from beyond space and time should show up, then a hue is in her element. She has faced down the worst facets of herself and learned to use them. Nothing outside a hue's own experiences can be worse... in most cases.

Advantages: Hues have a greater affinity for their nastier aspects than other spooks. They can call forth their Stains, with no danger of increasing their Spite, by spending two Vitality per Stain. A hue's ability to call on Stains turns a negative facet of themselves into a positive one.

Disadvantages: The greatest disadvantage for a hue is that their Vitality may never exceed their starting value, which in turn, has a maximum ceiling of seven regardless. They cannot suffuse themselves to 10 points as other characters can, be it through artifact, bizarre powers or crucible infusions. Their souls are not strong enough to hold more Vitality than their starting value.

The Vitality cap is a major disadvantage, and players may find this limitation frustrating. Hue characters should consider buying up their starting Vitality through freebie points (again, up to a maximum of seven Vitality) since they cannot use experience points to increase their Vitality. If a hue character does not buy up her Vitality, she may be a short-term visitor to the chronicle. Spite could easily consume a hue with a low starting Vitality.

SIGNATURE CHARACTER: CRAIG FOREST

A former sniper with an FBI Hostage Rescue Team and survivor of many NDEs, Craig Forest received an undercover assignment from the FBI to infiltrate Orpheus as a trainer. Orpheus' staff, however, quickly won Craig's trust and loyalty, and convinced him that the supernatural existed.

Craig grew obsessed with defending Orpheus from spectral attackers, but a staff member, Rachel Gonzalez offered him a solution, a drug called pigment that would allow him to see the dead. The black heroin overwhelmed Craig and he became an addict, turning to the streets when his addiction grew worse. He turned himself over to Orpheus, but to his surprise, they treated him and trained him as an agent. They hoped he could turn the addiction to his advantage.

When Craig broke ties with the FBI, his supervisors classified the incident as a cult situation and ordered Craig's retrieval for deprogramming. Unfortunately, Craig had a full dose of pigment in his veins the night the HRT came to retrieve him. He resisted, and the HRT team used too much force in capturing him. Craig Forest died at the hands of his former allies.

Craig is now a hue, a faded ghost. He protects Orpheus and defends other pigment victims. He has few answers about the drug or the washed out taint to his soul, but he'll find a way to overcome. He's still a sniper, if only in outlook, and he needs a target. The FBI has information on Orpheus, information that came from his files. Once Craig knows who was responsible for his death, he'll eliminate the threat and retrieve the FBI's files on his friends.

HORRORS

Projectors and ghosts can all wield powers called Horrors. Through these supernatural abilities, spooks may affect the physical world, mortals or each other. A ghost with the proper Horror can see the future, enthrall onlookers, hurl objects by force of will and perform other amazing feats.

More than anything else, possession of a particular Horror defines the various ghostly Shades; that's why a ghost or projector of each Shade automatically receives one particular Horror. Characters may buy other Horrors using freebie points or experience points, but they always learn that one Horror first.

Horrors are intimately related to a spook's personality. Each Horror reflects the way its possessor interacts with the world and with others. A Shade's defining Horror shows this connection most closely: A frustrated, explosive Poltergeist lashes out with the destructive, physical power of Helter Skelter; manipulative Skinriders commandeer the bodies of mortals through Puppetry, etc. Each Shade also possesses a second Horror that ghosts and projected entities of that Shade find fairly easy to learn, but do not gain automatically. Spooks find other Horrors more difficult to learn. Each Shade also has two Horrors they will find impossible to learn because they are so contrary to the spook's personality. Despite this, however, plenty of other Horrors remain from which to choose.

Unlike other Traits, Horrors do not operate on a scale of one to five dots. Either you know a Horror, or you don't. These powers are also broad: You can use each Horror in a variety of ways, depending on your creativity and how much Vitality your character expends. Each Horror starts with a basic, minor effect that the character may use at will. If a spook expends Vitality, the Horror exhibits greater effects. A ghost or projected entity may spend up to five Vitality on

a Horror, producing eerie and terrifying effects, but no spook expends that much of her essence lightly.

BENEFITS

Each Horror also includes a special ability called a Benefit. One character can link his power to another character to augment the Horrors used by the other spook. For instance, a Banshee might use his precognitive power to make another character's Horror likelier to succeed: The Banshee knows what works best, and passes that instinctive foreknowledge to his comrade. Applying Benefits this way is called *yoking*, while the voked partners are called donors (the person using his Benefit to someone else's Horror) and beneficiary (or recipient; the person receiving the effect). Ghosts and projectors must work together for several weeks to properly voke their powers, which gives members of a crucible an added incentive to stay together. A beneficiary may receive only one Benefit at a time, though, and characters may not apply benefits to their own Horrors.

A final note on Benefits: Most Horrors have a duration based on the Vitality used to power them. The moment a character uses a Benefit to help a compatriot, he ends the active effect of any Horror he already had in play. Thus, if a character is using Wail to attack a target (using enough Vitality to carry the effect for four turns) and switches to using his Benefit after two turns, he loses the remaining two turns of Wail's devastating cry. Additionally, characters can use a Benefit to enable their beneficiaries even if the recipients' abilities are already in effect. The only time this doesn't work is if the Benefit lowers a Vitality cost or assists the initial roll of a Horror. In this case, the donor must coordinate the Benefit prior to the beneficiary's first use of his power.

This chapter describes all the Horrors yet quantified by Orpheus.

Shade	Automatic Horror	Favored Horror	Banned Horrors
Banshee	Wail	Forebode	Helter Skelter & Congeal
Haunter	Inhabit	Witch's Nimbus	Forebode & Wail
Poltergeist	Helter Skelter	Congeal	Unearthly Repose & Storm-Wendir
Skinrider	Puppetry	Juggernaut	None yet known
Will-o'-the-Wisp	Unearthly Repose	Storm-Wending	Puppetry & Juggernaut

BANSHEE HORRORS

WAIL

Kate concentrated and felt the weight of a physical existence settle on her shoulders. She manifested fully behind the two shiv-waving muggers and their wide-eyed victim. The first mugger lifted his knife, smirking, and Kate didn't need any mystical prescience to know there would be blood spilled within seconds. Instinctively she inhaled, then she screamed. As they turned toward her, she could see the fear in their faces, but they kept hold of their weapons. Very well. The pitch of Kate's scream rose, and the pair fell to their knees, bleeding from eyes and ears.

This Horror allows the character to affect the universe around her with her voice; she may choose to play on the emotions of others with a gentle croon, raise outright terror in them or ultimately shriek loud enough to rip flesh, shatter bone and break rock. Unfortunately, this Horror affects the living (and spooks) only when the character manifests fully; otherwise, it remains unseen and unheard by the living and affects only ghosts and projected entities. At low Vitality expenditures, the user draws an emotional response from her targets, and her croon is audible to those nearby. She can calm fury, excite anger and even generate enough terror to send opponents fleeing or fainting on the spot. With more control, and at higher expenditures, her scream tears through flesh and even stone. It can even break the foundations of buildings or rip apart steel doors. Anyone within "normal" earshot, however, hears the Wail, whether humans (if the Banshee has manifested fully) or spooks (if not). Haunters may not take this Horror.

System: The ghost or projector using this Horror can tear down everything from emotions to flesh to granite, shrieking waves of pure fury at her targets. The spook may continue her Wail for a number of turns equal to (Vitality spent + 1), as long as she remains within range of her target. She may move without affecting the Horror, though she cannot dodge, fight or pursue any action more complicated than a simple walk. All physically damaging effects of this Horror are permanent (unless healed or rebuilt); emotional effects pass with time or with a change of situation. (It does little good to calm security guards and lull them into a state of peaceful relaxation if your Poltergeist friend then uses them as targets for knife-throwing practice.)

Spending zero to two Vitality points enables the character to affect the emotions of her target audience. At the simplest level (zero Vitality points spent), she can calm them and soothe their worries; with a higher expenditure of Vitality (two Vitality points), she can terrorize them into fleeing in panic. The target's Willpower is the difficulty for the roll using Manipulation + Empathy. The number of successes scored determines the degree of emotional reaction produced in the target, though Vitality spent also provides a maximum ceiling for effects (so spending no Vitality means the character can, at best, elicit nothing greater than a "One Success" effect; see chart). Neither are



emotional successes cumulative over the power's duration. If a character continues wailing, she will not increase the initial result unless she throws more Vitality into the mix, thus stacking successes. In adding more Vitality, however, the duration of the Wail only increases by the additional Vitality spent (and not Vitality + 1 each time).

Example: Kate tries calming a homicidal ghost through a one Vitality expenditure, meaning it's a two-turn effect. Although she rolls four successes on Manipulation + Empathy, she can have only three successes given she spent one Vitality in the process. The ghost is still dangerous, so Jennifer, Kate's player, throws another Vitality point into the Wail, rolling another two successes, both of which she can use. She adds the two new successes to the three old successes, bringing her total up to five successes. The Wail now lasts for three turns (initial Vitality spent of 1 + 1 for the normal bonus and another +1 for the extra Vitality thrown into the mix).

One Success: Mildly soothing or annoying. Lowers all dice pools pertaining to Physical actions by one if soothing; lowers all dice pools pertaining to Mental or Social based actions by one if annoying. Only one person affected; the maximum successes possible for zero Vitality points expenditure.

Two Successes: Calms a screaming baby or enrages the average queuing shopper. Lowers dice pools by two as above. Up to two people affected.

Three Successes: Pacifies an angry commuter or annoys a serene mother. Lowers dice pools by three as above. Up to five people affected; the maximum successes possible for one Vitality point expenditures.

Four Successes: Calms a freshly bereaved spouse or drives a controlled security guard into a fury. Lowers dice pools by four as above. Up to 10 people affected.

Five Successes: Pacifies a raging lunatic or enrages a meditating Buddhist monk. Lowers dice pools by five as above. Up to 50 people affected; the maximum successes possible for two Vitality points expenditure.

If a character spends **two** or **more Vitality points**, then she may use this Horror to physically wound one or more people directly in front of her, and within ten yards of her. If attacking a group of people, she may not distinguish among them; everyone in the group risks taking damage since they are all within range of her scream of fury.

If a ghost or projected spirit wishes to increase the power of the Horror while using it, the player may tack on additional Vitality to increase the effect, rather than starting from scratch.

Example: Jennifer spends two Vitality to terrify the muggers. Since there are two targets in her area of effect — as well as the victim, who unfortunately suffers as well — the Storyteller rolls against the Willpower of all present. Unfortunately, Jennifer rolls low, and fails to affect either mugger

(though the victim is now in an even more pitiful state of terror than before). Both muggers turn to attack Kate, since she is manifesting. Reluctantly, Jennifer spends her current two remaining Vitality points, upping the total points spent to four, and backs up so as not to harm the bystander. She wails on a purely physical level, targeting muggers' bodies. This Wail will last for another two turns, since she's spent an additional two Vitality points.

Spending four or more points of Vitality enables the character to rip apart solid wood, stone or metal. Inanimate matter is, in some ways, easier to affect with raw force than human flesh or spook gauze, and may be targeted more precisely. The character may destroy up to the number of successes that she's rolled in cubic feet of that substance, though she may choose to restrict the scope of the damage. For instance, if she wishes to merely shatter the lock of a safe or rip a door from its hinges, she may narrow her focus (of course, destroying the building's cornerstone, or the key piece of a dam, may carry other dangers with it....). Since this affects physical matter, the character must manifest fully to use this Horror in this capacity.

Wood and similar substances have a difficulty of 4 to attack: stone has a difficulty of 6: steel and similar metals have a difficulty of 8. If the character targets a human being or spook, then the Wail does lethal damage as listed above.

Against Armor ratings, an expenditure of **three** or **more Vitality** bypasses limited armor rating, with the sheer force of the Wail vibrating through the armor and shattering flesh, bone and inorganic matter. At three Vitality, the attack ignores Armor ratings of one, while at four Vitality, it ignores Armor ratings of two, etc.

Of final note, certain Vitality expenditures may overlap in effect, meaning the character must choose between the effects. Spending two Vitality points, for example, allows the character either to elicit an emotional response or to attack physically instead. By spending four or more Vitality, the character can either blast a living target for lethal damage or damage an object.

Benefit: For one Vitality, the character doubles the range, area of effect or number of targets of a compatriot's Horror. Using this power's insight into the emotions of others, the donor may lend that understanding to a beneficiary, giving him a sense of clearer vision and more precise control. The character donating this effect controls who gains the Benefit, but not whether the recipient applies it toward range, number of targets or area of effect. The Benefit is immediate, and lasts only for a turn, but the donor can direct it toward anyone within line of sight, even if the recipient Horror is already in effect.

FOREBODE

Kate looked around the disused bathroom. A stain across the floor and halfway up the wall marked where the shooting had taken place two weeks ago, and where they'd lost the pigment courier's trail. She took a deep breath, and crooned a note that deepened in complexity. The shadows in the corners of the room gained depth, then congealed and resolved into two human figures in front of her, one with a gun pointed squarely at the other's head.

"Nothing personal," said the one with the gun, and fired.

Kate watched the blood and brains spray out into the patterns of the stain on the floor and wall. She stepped closer to the shooter, memorizing his face as he stood there, frozen in the moment of the vision.

Stories hold that ghosts see and know things that the living cannot perceive; this Horror gives characters the means to do so, allowing them limited glimpses into the past and future. A ghost or projected soul has already stepped outside the normal frame of life and death, and he has a greater understanding of the events that lie before and after her current place in the flow of time. She calls on the universe for answers, and such is the power of her voice that the universe must respond. At low levels, the character cannot ask specific questions and can only hope for a glimpse of major forthcoming disasters, or for a vision of the immediate past. Greater control and higher expenditures of Vitality allow a character to gain specific answers to questions spanning decades. The questions must be about a specific person or artifact, however, and cannot be about such major things as countries or organizations (like Orpheus Group), or vague queries like "tell me about Orpheus." A vision of the past may be precise and detailed, showing what actually happened; a glimpse of the future may be a set of cryptic images, showing separate actions or split-second decisive moments, which may well be hard to interpret. Only the character herself sees these visions, however much she may wish to share them with her colleagues. Haunters may not take this Horror.

System: The character may see into the past of her immediate vicinity, or into the future with relation to specific potential events. The effect lasts for several turns equal to (Vitality expended + 1); if the ghost or projector spends zero vitality, then the effect lasts for a single turn.

Envisioning the past is comparatively simple, though possibly traumatic, especially in such matters as watching the murder of a friend. Seeing the future is much more complicated. After all, the future isn't fixed... what the character sees is a probable future, or worse, futures, based on the current state of affairs and the people who will create that potential eventuality. She may perceive an image of a particular event, or set of events, or she may see a cryptic image like a lamb being devoured by a flock of bloody-beaked crows. Characters cannot always be certain what causes the event they see, either; sometimes they can act through the best of intentions, trying to terrify someone into inaction or making sure a friend stays at home. only to discover they created the very event they foresaw....

Example: Kate attempts to focus her perceptions on the next day. She sees a gun pointing at her student's head; she can see that clearly, just as she can see the expression of sheer terror on her student's face. A surgical mask hides the gunman's identity, but his pose is professional. A click echoes through her vision as the assailant cocks the trigger. "Talk," he says. "When did you last see Ms. Dennison and her friends?" The image begins unraveling into threads of silver, and she struggles to hold it together long enough to see the student's answer.

The Vitality spent when using the Horror governs how long the vision lasts, and how far the character can extend her perceptions into the past or future.

Forebode snaps directly to the precise event, omitting stages along the way.

Benefit: For one Vitality, the characters can lend her expertise with this power to a compatriot, granting him the benefit of her insight into the past and future, and lowering the difficulty of actions by two. For the beneficiary, his focus

Zero Vitality: Field of effect extends up to one hour in either direction (past or future) and lasts for one turn. One Vitality: Field of effect extends up to one day in either direction and lasts for two turns. Two Vitality: Field of effect extends up to one week in either direction and lasts for three turns. Three Vitality: Field of effect extends up to one month in either direction and lasts for four turns. Four Vitality: Field of effect extends up to one year in either direction and lasts for five turns. Five Vitality: Field of effect extends up to ten years in either direction and lasts for six turns.

The number of successes rolled on Perception + Empathy (difficulty 6) determines how precise the character's vision of the past may be, or how much she gleans from her glimpse of the future.

One Success: Past — The ghost or projector sees a blurred version of events directly in front of her for the duration of the Horror. Future — She perceives a single event that will take place, but might not perceive the

context of that event.

Past — The ghost or projector clearly sees events from the angle at which she is standing, and dimly Two Successes:

hears what is said. Future — She sees a relevant event, together with some context to that event.

Three Successes: Past — The character clearly sees and hears what transpired, from the angle where she is standing. Future—She sees an event relevant to the question on her mind, whether she realizes it is relevant or not.

Past — The character clearly sees and hears what took place, and she may move around to watch the

action from different angles. Future — She sees the probable future (and at least one possible alternative future) clearly.

Four Successes:

Five Successes: Past — The ghost or projector sees and hears precisely what happened at that place, and may look outside the "main action" to examine the background. This is a full replay of the relevant event, which

she may watch from any angle she desires. Future — She has a clear vision relevant to the question on her mind, or — if there are several possible directions that the future could take — she sees the nexus

point on which these futures depend.

NOTE FOR STORYTELLERS

It is difficult to juggle a character who can see portions of the future without making the players feel railroaded. As a consequence of this, it must be emphasized that Banshees do not see a definite future set in stone. They see what is probable, given their insight into human nature, the way people behave and — if they're extremely successful or adept — they may see some of the nexus points that may (or may not) result in this particular future. Visions of the future, however, are rarely fully clear, are often cryptic, and might never happen. Characters who use this Horror must realize how uncertain the future is and how easily it is changed. Even the most powerful of Banshees cannot see all things. That said, Chapter Five: Storytelling the Dead (see Future Sights, p. 259) includes a list of possible future events when viewed by Forebode. This allows Storytellers to offer players tantalizing glimpses of past or future events without ruining Orpheus' story arcs, or feeling completely blind to it.

suddenly sharpens and he can predict exactly how his power would work, giving him a better idea of where to apply force and impetus. The donor controls who is the beneficiary is, though no actual contact is necessary. The effect is immediate, lasting only the turn, but may benefit anyone within direct eyesight. If the recipient does not roll for his Horror's effect within the span of a turn (ending when everyone's action does) he loses the boon bestowed by this Benefit.

HAUNTER HORRORS

INHABIT

Hoyt slipped through the Mustang's hood, his spirit form diffusing itself throughout the muscle car, merging with it... pistons for muscles, battery for a heart. With a thought, Hoyt turned his ignition and flipped on his lights, thrilling to the V-8's throaty growl. He caught the border guards flat-footed. Before they even thought of drawing their guns, he was past the checkpoint, a driverless sports car heading north on Interstate 5 at over 100 miles per hour. Hoyt knew the San Diego run like the back of his hand. It would take the police a couple of minutes to mobilize, minutes he could use to lose himself on the city's surface streets.

The Haunters' Horror of choice, Inhabit, is most probably the origin of the ghost-story trope of the haunted house/car/dorm room/etc. A projector/ghost with this Horror may suffuse an object with the gauze constituting his spirit form, flowing through said object and essentially becoming one with it. Once a character merges with something, it becomes, for all intents and purposes, an extension of his own being — a temporary "body" of sorts. Therefore, the projector's or ghost's senses extend throughout the inhabited object, and he gains conscious control over all its component parts.

While inhabiting an item, a character may have it perform any action that it normally performs. A microwave still cooks food, a cell phone allows calls for help (with the character's voice) and an automobile moves. The object, however, is also capable of actions familiar to classic hauntings. The Haunter can cause doors of an inhabited house to close and lock themselves, a chandelier in a ballroom to fall unexpectedly and a mirror to shatter into pieces (or a broken one to repair itself). Anything from generating ghostly footsteps in a house's hallways to making all the footlights within a long-abandoned theater shine, then explode, is possible through clever use of this Horror.

System: The projected entity or ghost may merge with an inanimate object, effectively "possessing" it. There is typically no dice roll required; Inhabit automatically assumes the projector spent the Vitality necessary for an object of that size (see chart). One spook may displace another inhabiting an object, however, through the appropriate Vitality expenditure and his player's garnering more successes on a resisted Willpower roll than his opponent. This conflict is quite disturbing to those able to see it, with both entities' distorted features rising partially out of the contested object and falling back in upon their adversary.

Once a character has uncontested control of an object, he may perform any function with it that he would normally be capable of doing. A microwave oven can still pop popcorn, even with someone inhabiting it. He may also perceive anything around or within that object as if it were his own body. Hence, a character can see through a car's headlights like they were eyes or hear anything said within that car's interior (or even immediately adjacent to the vehicle). He'd even feel it if another car sideswiped the one he inhabited. Finally, a character in possession of an object may exert his own Attributes and Abilities through that item as a means of manipulation or attack. Thus, a house's front door may swing open (or closed) violently with the character's Strength + Brawl, or a getaway car's engine may stutter and stall to foil a bank heist with a successful Manipulation + Subterfuge roll.

Example: An agent of Terrel & Squib is rushing across the parking lot of Orpheus' headquarters with an ill-gotten disk full of vital cryonic cradle technology. Orpheus' chief Haunter, Hoyt Masterson, is aware of the theft and uses Inhabit to merge with a BMW convertible in the thief's flight path. Hoyt's player, John, rolls his character's Dexterity + Brawl to swing the car's door out and stop the thief. Hoyt's Dexterity is 4 and his Brawl is 2. Rolling his six dice at difficulty 6, John gets three successes. Hoyt's Strength is 3, and Lucien, the Storyteller, tells John the door itself will add an additional die of bashing damage, so John rolls 6 dice, netting five health levels of damage. The door swings out at full tilt, striking the thief who smashes through the car's driver-side window. Hoyt may have retrieved the disk, but he's still going to have to answer for damaging the VP of R&D's car.

Vitality spent determines the size of the object inhabited through this Horror, as follows:

Zero Vitality: The character may inhabit any small, hand-held object, like a cell phone or pistol.

One Vitality: The character may possess any object no more than two feet square in size — a microwave or personal computer, for instance.

Two Vitality: The spook can control any item approximately human size, from a motorcycle to a bookcase.

Three Vitality: At this level of expenditure, a character may inhabit any object up to the size of a large SUV, be it a high-performance automobile or a large generator.

Four Vitality: The character can inhabit large mobile objects or small structures at this level, like a battle tank or a standard house.

Five Vitality: The largest structures a single entity can inhabit at this level include a richly furnished mansion or a standard airliner.

While inhabiting an object, a character may exert his will over that item to bring about more specialized effects, rather than just lashing out with it. To do so, the player rolls his character's Stamina + Crafts, comparing the results to the following:

One Success: The character may exert himself from within an object to produce some minor, but terrifying special effect. With a single success, it is possible for a ghost to create disembodied footsteps in a deserted hallway or strange voices over a phone, or even leave "handprints" visible on the inside of a mirror's glass.

Two Successes: With two successes, the projector or ghost may power a device himself without any external source. For the duration of a scene, a character could easily power a computer left unplugged or even operate a car without gasoline.

Three Successes: With a third success, a character may actively harm the host object through an exertion of will. He may cause a computer's hard drive to lock up, a copier to jam or even a car's brake line to sever itself.

Four Successes: At this level of success, a character intuitively understands the function of all components within his artificial "body" and may endeavor to make repairs on the device or vehicle from within. Roll Intelligence + Crafts or Technology (whichever is appropriate). The character can even effect impossible repairs through Inhabit, so a car's broken headlights might regrow themselves from their shattered remnants or a crumbled fender straighten itself. Such repairs are permanent.

Five Successes: At this point, the character may make dramatic physical alterations to a host object. He could brick up a house's windows, manipulate a stairway's banisters as tentacles, or bring

a marble statue to life and attack (remember, these items still possess only the Strength of the projector inhabiting them — though the marble fists of a statue might add 1 to damage, for example, and the result may be lethal; the Storyteller is the final arbiter in such situations).

The Haunter is relatively immune to damage directed at the item. Each turn someone successfully targets and harms the item being possessed, the Haunter loses a point of Vitality. The car can be on fire, and the Haunter still only suffers that one point.

Uses of Inhabit typically last a scene, though a ghost or projected entity may spend a point of temporary Willpower to extend possession for an additional scene. Through repeated uses of this Horror on the same object, a Haunter may build up a familiarity with that item. Such a favored item may be inhabited indefinitely and requires one fewer Vitality be spent to initiate the possession (or one success fewer to elicit a specific effect; Storyteller's discretion). A Haunter may have as many favored items as he has dots in Willpower.

Benefit: For a point of Vitality, the donor can effectively delay the beneficiary's Horror effect. Using a process similar to what the character uses when inhabiting an object, the donor imbeds the recipient's own Horror into the physical structure of a host object. Unlike the donor's own gauze, the imbedded effect is soon rejected by the object, with the effect immediately manifesting once free. The donor may delay the onset of the other Horror's effect from one to three turns, depending on how deeply he plants the effect within the structure of the host object. Area of effect Horrors center upon the object they're imbedded within, whereas blasts continue along their initial trajectories (thus, they can aim down a hallway but cannot target individuals unless they happen to be in front of the blast as it unfolds.)

WITCH'S NIMBUS

Kate's scream took out the Spectre with the hook, but it also attracted the attention of a pack of Lost Boys that were now dragging her down through sheer numbers. Suddenly, a bolt of electricity struck one of the prepubescent Spectres in the chest, boiling away its gauze. With a growl, the pack turned to see a tall man approaching with a swagger in his step. A bright-blue nimbus of crackling electricity surrounded him. "That ain't no way t' treat a lady," Hoyt drawled with a wink and a smile.

Ghost stories abound with tales of spirits that glow balefully in the dark, their bright outlines visible and flitting between the headstones of cemeteries or gliding across fog-shrouded moors. Perhaps this Horror is the basis of such legends. With Witch's Nimbus, the character surrounds himself with a radiant halo of flickering white fire or coruscating electricity. Thereafter, anyone who attacks or is attacked by the character in hand-to-hand combat suffers damage from her exposure to Witch's Nimbus.

Zero Vitality: Activating Witch's Nimbus without Vitality expenditure produces either a small ball of fire or a sparking electrical sphere. Each is about the size and intensity of candle flame and may be used to read by or to ignite flammable materials with which it comes into contact. At this level, the Horror provides no protection from attack.

One Vitality: A single point of Vitality surrounds the character's form with either a sheath of white flame or an arcing aura of blue-white electricity. Anyone or anything coming into contact with this effect takes one level of lethal damage. In instances where the encompassed character strikes an opponent in hand-to-hand combat, the character's fists still do bashing damage. The power adds a level of lethal damage in addition to the attack's normal damage. The defender, if she can, soaks the two attacks separately. The light emitted by this Horror is great enough that Stealth rolls suffer a penalty of one to their normal difficulty against those who can see it.

Two Vitality: At this level, the Witch's Nimbus surrounding the character grows in both power and intensity. It now deals two levels of lethal damage to those who come into contact with it, and Stealth rolls now suffer two to their difficulty.

Three Vitality: By spending three Vitality, the character becomes a veritable raging bonfire or crackling

dynamo. His slightest touch deals three levels of lethal damage automatically, and all damage done in hand-to-hand combat is now lethal. Also, the power of the Witch's Nimbus is such at this level that the character can hurl balls of fire or bolts of electricity to a range of 10 yards once every other turn. Ranged attacks made with Witch's Nimbus use the character's Dexterity + Athletics to determine success. The damage is the same as that delivered by the character's touch.

Any Stealth attempts made against those who can perceive the character now suffer three to their normal difficulty. At the temperatures the character now generates, his feet will scorch black any flammable materials he treads upon, and he will typically set nearby materials alight and trigger fire sprinklers (which won't affect him).

Four Vitality: With an expenditure of four Vitality, the Witch's Nimbus blazes to even greater heights of power. The character's fiery or electrifying aura not only deals four levels of lethal damage to those in direct contact with him, it now does one health level of lethal damage to anyone within five feet of the character (burning her with ambient heat or leaping arcs of electricity). The projector or ghost may now hurl flame or electricity once per turn, still up to 10 yards away. His footsteps will scorch concrete, and, if he's not careful, he'll end up ankle deep in



asphalt. The character is anything but inconspicuous, and any Stealth attempts against those capable of perceiving him suffer a difficulty penalty of four. At this level, however, the character's output of light comes with a distinct advantage. Attacks against the Haunter requiring vision to aim now suffer a penalty of one to their difficulty.

Five Vitality: At this intensity, the character's nimbus burns like a miniature sun or lightning strike. The Witch's Nimbus deals two levels of lethal damage to all who come within 10 feet of the character, and those who suffer the character's touch take five levels. As before, all damage inflicted by the character in hand-to-hand combat remains lethal. The character may hurl fire or electricity up to twice per turn to a distance of 10 yards (at a cost of splitting the attack dice pool). The character's merest touch while at this intensity can melt steel or fuse sand into glass. Manifesting physically while at this strength may have dire consequences to the character's surroundings, so characters should use caution and foresight. The spook now shines as brilliantly as burning magnesium. It is impossible for a character using Witch's Nimbus at this intensity to conceal himself, so Stealth rolls always fail against any who can perceive the character. Attacks made on the character using standard vision to aim are made with a penalty of two to their difficulty.

In addition, by concentrating and spending additional Vitality, the character may generate an arc of electricity or a gout of flame, directing it against opponents in combat.

System: By concentrating and spending Vitality, a character using this Horror excites the ectoplasmic particles constituting the gauze of his spirit form. The friction generates either intense heat or a tremendous static charge depending on whether the character bounces the particles off one another for heat or slides them across one another to build up static electricity. Effects vary according to Vitality spent, as follows:

The effects of Witch's Nimbus last a scene.

Example: Hoyt, who paid four Vitality to activate his Witch's Nimbus, wishes to blast one of Kate's attackers with a bolt of electricity. Hoyt's Dexterity is 4, and his Athletics is 2. John, Hoyt's player, rolls six dice (equal to Hoyt's Dexterity 4 + Athletics 2) and achieves two successes, hitting the Lost Boy square in the chest, and delivering five levels of lethal damage (four for the Witch's Nimbus + one additional success) before the creature's soak. If nothing else, Hoyt now has the Spectre's undivided attention.

Benefit: For a cost of one Vitality, a donor can double the duration of a yoked Horror's effect. Thus, an effect that was previously a "one shot" now lasts one continuous turn, while an effect with a one hour duration now functions for two. To boost another Horror's duration, the donor acts like a battery, powering up the effect with glowing motes or embers that flow from his outstretched palms into the beneficiary's gauze-form.

POLTERGEIST HORRORS HELTER SHELTER

The gunmen advanced on Samuel's collapsed body, eager to inflict a brutal finale to their chase. Ben slipped through the wall and concentrated on the machine shop's tools, impaling the immediate implements around him with silvery cords of his own essence that skittered from his fingertips like wasps. No time for subtlety; Ben whipped his hands above his head, and the tools followed suit, spinning around the room in a clumsy ballet of one-string puppets and raining metal against the startled gunmen.

If the angry ghost is a staple of the genre's yarns, then Helter Skelter would be their Horror of choice. It enables a character to grab objects through silvery strings of Vitality that extend from his ephemeral fingertips and thread their way into physical objects, regardless of whether the spook manifests or not. The character may then dictate the amount of control or force he wishes to extend through the object to affect the living. Greater control means the ability to manipulate some items with enough finesse to write words with a pen (in this respect, the tethers are unearthly fingers), while greater force increases the thrust and power behind an object. The character may spear multiple items with Helter Skelter, but this decreases his control to the point that he can only throw items around like a rock in a sling.

Of course, for mortals, they see only the objects moving of their own accord, unless the ghost or projected entity is manifesting at the time. In this case, the silver strings flitter intermittently in and out of existence. Projectors and other ghosts, however, see the silver strings clearly, though they cannot sever or affect them otherwise. Banshees cannot take this Horror.

System: The character may manipulate physical objects within a 30-yard radius for a number of turns equal to (Vitality expended + 1), as long as he can see the items in question. That means a zero Vitality effect works for that one turn (0 Vitality + 1). Upon grasping a physical object through the silver tethers, the character can infuse it with up to five Vitality, engendering a number of effects. The base result at a zero point expenditure of Vitality is that the character can instill the object with one die of both Strength and Dexterity. This is automatic since the character can't manipulate any object without first imparting it with some power and mobility. Every additional point spent increases the effect by an additional die of Strength or Dexterity, but not both. Thus, with a five Vitality point expenditure, the spook manipulates it with a total of five dots spread across Strength and Dexterity (not including the one dot automatically assigned to each) as indicated below, for six turns (5 Vitality + 1). If the character is incapacitated or forced back into her body, however, the tethers vanish and all objects simply crash to the floor.



Each point of Strength controls about four pounds worth of material, enabling the character to manipulate it within the 30-yard radius and hurl it for a distance of (Horror Strength x 5) yards. The punishment it inflicts is equal to the Horror's Strength in bashing or lethal damage dice, depending on the implements being manipulated. Books and chairs, for instance, inflict bashing damage, while knives and screwdrivers would be lethal damage. These dice are added to any extra successes achieved on the hit roll, made using the Horror's Dexterity + Melee (difficulty 6). Thus, if the character acquired three successes on this roll (two more than he needed to hit), then he would roll the Horror's Strength + 2 dice for damage.

If the character controls multiple objects, he loses one dot of Dexterity per object (or group of objects) weighing over four pounds (rule of thumb: Three to four small objects like screwdrivers and knives count as one group of objects). The spook cannot have less than one dot in this Horror's Dexterity, which means there is a limit to how many items he can wield. Thus, when the Horror's Dexterity reaches one, the character cannot manipulate a pound or object more. While swarming someone with these items does not directly increase the Horror's damage or attacks, it does have two effects: First, each item or group of items decreases the attacker's difficulty to hit by one per object or group of implements. Second, it confuses the targets, penalizing them by increasing their difficulty to all actions during the barrage by one per implement or group

of implements. Thus, it reduces the victim's likelihood of successfully dodging, and thus potentially raises damage.

Example: Ben invests four Vitality into Helter Skelter, creating a 4 dot effect with 3 Strength and 3 Dexterity (4 dots plus the initial +1 to Strength and Dexterity). He then grabs seven small tools (two groups of implements), which the Storyteller determines will drop his Horror's Dexterity by two, to Dexterity 1. He rolls the attack as per the Horror's Dexterity + Melee. His difficulty to hit drops from 6 to 4 due to the amount of objects flying through the air, while the target may attempt to dodge, but with a difficulty penalty of two to the roll.)

While this power doesn't affect living organic matter (like flesh, fur or plants, which it cannot penetrate), characters may use Helter Skelter to rip the gun from someone's hand or manipulate their shoes to trip them. The former, for example, requires a Disarm roll using the Horror's current Dexterity rating + Brawl as an attack roll with an increased difficulty of one. The latter is a Sweep maneuver using the Horror's current Dexterity rating + Brawl as an attack roll with an increased difficulty of two. Any character trying to use this ability to manipulate a firearm or access a computer terminal from across the room may make their rolls as normal, using the Horror's current Dexterity rating + the relevant Ability, but with an increased difficulty of two.

Finally, characters may add or drop Vitality from an effect, but they cannot regain lost Vitality. If they increase

Zero Vitality: One dot in Strength and Dexterity; one turn of control

One Vitality: +1 dot to either Strength and/or Dexterity; two turns of control

Two Vitality: +2 dots to either Strength and/or Dexterity; three turns of control

Three Vitality: +3 dots to either Strength and/or Dexterity; four turns of control

Four Vitality: +4 dots to either Strength and/or Dexterity; five turns of control

Five Vitality: +5 dots to either Strength and/or Dexterity; six turns of control

an effect, they need only pay the difference in Vitality and increase the turns the power remains in effect accordingly.

Benefit: For one Vitality, the character may energize a beneficiary's effect, adding a +2 Vitality boost to their Horror. The effect is akin to feeling excited about someone's presence, that moment we all feel electrified around certain people, like they were a fuse. The entity projecting this effect simply has control over whom he "touches" in this manner, even though no contact is necessary. The effect is immediate, lasting only the turn, but it can be directed at anyone within eyesight.

CONGEAL

The pallid apparition flitted through the doorway, slowly coming to rest in the center of the wide chamber. As it slowed, what passed for a muzzle on the creature's shadowy face jerked into the air, from side to side and back again.

Shit, thought Ben. The god-damn thing smells me.

Ben scanned his shelter, a small nook, for something that might pass for a weapon, but he was trapped and weaponless. Fine, Ben thought. We'll do it your way, dead meat. He wasn't one for backing out of a perfectly good fight, anyway. With that, Ben turned toward the doorway, not so much hearing as sensing the thing's approach. Closing his eyes, he folded his hands together as though praying. The edges of his palms shimmered, finally, coalescing into the shape of a revolver congealed from his own gauze. It was a very large revolver.

"Let's dance!" Ben said and strode into the chamber.

The Poltergeist who learns to focus his rage becomes a terrifying opponent, indeed. With a little practice he can harness the potent energy of his volatile essence, forming tools and weapons made of his own gauze. This process, called congealing, has saved many a spook's existence, for with its secrets, a Poltergeist may never again be caught unprepared. Moreover, it turns his own ghostly form into a veritable tool shed, whereby anything the crucible needs might be fashioned on the spot.

This Horror enables a character to mold real-world items from his own gauze by spending varying amounts of Vitality. The ghost or projecting soul can create up to two items with Congeal, but cannot hand them off to others. The objects exist in (or in place of) the creator's hand through force of will, and remain part of him regardless

their form. Anything "fired" at a target lasts long enough to make the flight and impart impact damage, upon which the projectile dissipates. In addition, objects created by means of this Horror are made of life essence, and are thus tougher than the average example of the item type. A congealed crowbar, for instance, would be a very effective weapon (and nigh unbreakable).

Ordinarily, objects created through this Horror can affect only other spooks. The exception to this occurs if and when the character manifests. In this case, congealed objects appear with him and may affect living beings and other real-world objects as well, for as long as they last. The user may also create items when manifesting. Banshees may not take this Horror.

System: To congeal an object, the player must roll Manipulation + the appropriate Ability (difficulty 7), before deciding how much Vitality to invest. The pertinent Ability depends on what the character intends to create: Crafting a sword or club, for example, requires a Manipulation + Melee roll. A revolver requires Manipulation + Firearms. If Crafts (something the character knows well) can represent the Ability, then the difficulty is reduced by one since it represents an innate understanding of the creation of the item in question — an obvious benefit when it comes to crafting plasm facsimiles thereof.

A congealed object lasts for the duration of the scene, regardless of whether the scene is extended combat over two hours or two turns. It disintegrates into viscid wisps of spirit stuff when the user falls unconscious, when the scene ends or when the character dispels the item.

The type and complexity of congealed weapons is determined and limited by the amount of Vitality invested in them at the time of their creation. Without actually investing any Vitality *into* the item, objects are simple extensions of the character's own form. In addition, these zero-Vitality "tools" inflict only bashing damage (regardless if the ghost/projector has some other means by which his unarmed attacks inflict lethal damage; the zero-Vitality effect is straight bashing damage). Typically, all a viewer would see in this instance is that a particular part of the character's body assumes a rough-hewn look, as though his fist (or foot, or what have you) was chiseled from stone rather than "flesh." In this cheap, but effective way, spooks can harden their forms and thereby inflict greater damage in unarmed combat.

Once Vitality congeals into an object, however, it takes on a solidity and appearance of its own, and may be used just as any normal example of the item type. It is important to note that once an item is "finished" (infused with all the Vitality it receives upon creation), it cannot be changed or later reintegrated into the character's form for its Vitality. It is, for all intents and purpose, the genuine article — for as long as it lasts. Greater Vitality also allows for greater damage potential, and a knife created with Congeal inflicts Strength +1 lethal damage, just like any regular knife.

More sophisticated simulacra require greater Vitality, and while a character can create a "gun," the object has no real moving parts. Instead, the bullets fly through force of will, and would work just as effectively if the character conjured and threw darts or fired arrows from a bow. Firearms come complete with enough plasm ammunition for

Zero Vitality: Hardened hands; max. Strength +1 bashing damage.

One Vitality: Small objects (knife, lock-picks, "brass" knuckles, club, key, etc.); Strength +1 lethal or +2 bashing damage; no projectiles.

Two Vitality: Medium objects (sap, small ax, short sword, darts, arrows, etc.); Strength +2 lethal damage or +3 bashing; one-shot projectiles (darts, shuriken, arrows), each of which costs two Vitality per four shots.

Three Vitality: Large objects (large axe, light revolver, heavy pistol, crowbar, etc.); Strength +3 lethal damage, +4 bashing damage or five damage dice pool; single shot firearm projectiles.

Four Vitality: Large objects (rifle, heavy revolver, shotgun, warhammer, etc.); Strength +4 lethal damage, +5 bashing damage or 8 damage dice pool; 3-Round Burst possible for firearm projectiles.

Five Vitality: Large objects (bastard sword, assault rifle, small machinegun); Strength +5 lethal damage, +6 bashing damage or eight damage dice pool; Automatic Fire possible for firearm projectiles.

one 16-round "clip" per point of Vitality expended. Once this initial cache runs out, the character can congeal additional clips for one Vitality each, at a cost of one action. Bullets are the only projectile capable of firing multiple rounds (where indicated) at higher levels of Vitality. Darts, daggers, arrows and the like do not use the 3-Round Burst and Automatic Fire bonuses because of their larger size (and thus greater Vitality expenditure).

In all cases, the projectile's range, whether thrown, fired or set loose, is equal to Vitality spent x 5 in yards, using the pertinent Traits required for such a weapon (like Dexterity + Firearms/Athletics; difficulty 6). The weapon cannot fire at double its range, however, because the projectile will dissipate beyond the range indicated.

The character can also create and use nonviolent tools, like a lockpick to pick a door, a crowbar to pry open a box or a beam propped to the ground to keep a door shut. All these are feasible, though using them with any finesse (lockpicks, for example) requires a Manipulation + (pertinent Ability) roll. Others simply work as would a physical object.

Benefit: For one Vitality, the donor may strengthen a compatriot's attack, adding an additional +4 damage dice to the subsequent strike (if successful). The effect feels like someone guiding the blow home, or in the case of supernatural attacks, providing a boost to the power's potency. Only one Vitality per turn may be spent on this Benefit, which assists one attack, but contact is not necessary; it can be directed at any target within sight. The donor must spend the Vitality before the recipient makes the attack, but is the Vitality is not wasted if the attack misses; the "boost" is good until the subject successfully strikes or the scene ends. The donor cannot stack multiple applications of this Benefit; the beneficiary must first expend this Benefit's boost in a successful attack before the donor can empower her again.

SHINRIDER HORRORS

PUPPETRY

Norsby slept on his back with a dark-haired dame cuddled against him. They were both nude under the silk sheets. Chet Mason sighed a bodiless sigh. Some sons of bitches had all the luck; of course, a few billion dollars helped too.

Mason leaned over Norsby and concentrated on the silver threads of force running through the billionaire's body. He wrapped his incorporeal fingers around a handful of them, glared at the billionaire like he would at a slow recruit and barked, "Up and at 'em, soldier!" — and he was in. Norsby's body opened its eyes.

For a moment, Mason savored the feel of the sheets and Norsby's companion against his skin, then he sighed again and climbed out of bed. He'd spent a lot of his own energy claiming the billionaire's body so completely. Mason had a job to do and couldn't waste any time.

The dead can come back to usurp the bodies of the living. Some traditions, like that of the Jewish *dybbuk*, regard such possession with horror. Other traditions, such as *voudon*, treat it as a sacred bond between mortals and the divine. No ghostly power inspires more fear and awe than Puppetry, for no Horror affects mortals quite so intimately.

Unless a character materializes before attacking, mortals cannot see Puppetry in action. At most, they see the Horror's effects: A person shifts his stance, or speaks with a different cadence; perhaps there's a stiff pause while the spook takes over the body of her victim. Even if someone gained the intuition that a different soul lurked behind the eyes of a friend, family member or co-worker... well, that's crazy talk.

Some spooks use Puppetry to experience life's pleasures again. Others use it to torment people they don't like. A Skinrider can ruin a person's reputation, his credit rating, his family and friendships... or commit murders that look like senseless suicides.

Someone employing Puppetry sees silver threads of soul-stuff strung throughout mortal bodies. By plucking a few of these strings, the spook can briefly impose his will on the mortal in limited ways. For a longer and more complete possession, however, a character must clutch at all the puppet-strings he can. From an otherworldly perspective, a silver sheen ripples over the victim's body at the moment of possession and a possessed person's eyes shine silver for the briefest moment. Then, they are indistinguishable from all the other mortals, even to a spook's eyes. Wisps cannot take this Horror.

System: Puppetry requires a full action to use. The character could split that action to perform other mundane tasks, but not any other supernatural feat. The player rolls Charisma + Leadership, with the target's Willpower as the difficulty. The number of successes gives the maximum length of time the ghost can possess her victim:

One Successes: Two Successes: Three Successes: Four Successes: Five or More Successes: Influence for one turn
Influence for one minute
Influence for a scene
Influence for a day
Influenceforanindefiniteperiod

The number of Vitality points invested in the attack limits this maximum duration, however. A character can expend from zero to five Vitality in a Puppetry attack; the *effective* number of successes cannot exceed one plus the number of Vitality points spent. Thus, a zero Vitality use of Puppetry cannot affect a target for more than a single turn, while a two Vitality attack cannot result in more than one scene of possession, no matter how many successes the player rolls.

The Vitality expenditure also sets the degree of possession:

Zero Vitality: Puppetry cannot achieve more than a brief, simple action by a victim who isn't really paying attention. For instance, at this level the character could make a walking victim step into an alley, or a victim with a pen in her hand write I'M GOING TO KILL YOU. The character cannot make a victim park her car, get out and step into the alley, nor stand up from watching TV to find a pen and paper to write — those action sequences are too long and complicated to achieve in one simple action. At this basic level, as soon as a target recognizes he's done something odd without meaning to, the target is mentally on guard. He becomes immune to further zero-Vitality effects until he lowers his guard again.

One Vitality: The possessor can either control one part of the victim's body as above, or actually occupy the target's body. Either way, the character can induce simple actions only (equal to those from zero-Vitality use of Puppetry) — but can attempt such actions even when the target is on guard. Each attempt still requires a separate Charisma + Leadership roll to control the target for that turn, though. The character shares all the victim's senses and controls the host like a clumsy marionette, with an effective Dexterity 1. Onlookers can see that something is very wrong with the victim, while the victim knows something is very wrong with himself. Since the character can control just one part of the victim's body at a time, the victim can try to stop the "invader" or scream for help (those folks who run around screaming, "I'm possessed..."? Well, maybe they are.).

Two Vitality: A character enjoys full control of the target's body for as long as she actively concentrates on making the victim act or speak. When the character no longer concentrates, the victim regains control of his body. The body's motions remain clumsy and puppetlike, with a Dexterity of 1.

Three Vitality: At the previous levels of Vitality expenditure, victims remain fully conscious. Zero Vitality attacks seem like puzzling, but momentary lapses; at one or two Vitality, the target feels an alien

will intruding on his own. By expending three Vitality, the character can suppress as much of the target's consciousness as she wants, leaving the target with gaps in his memory corresponding to the periods of control. The possessor can use the victim's body without any further effort, but cannot access any of the victim's Abilities or memories. At any level, though, a Skinrider can always opt to leave the victim conscious or merely "ride along" for a while, leaving the victim in control. The character uses her Dexterity or the victim's, whichever score is lower.

Four Vitality: This enables full control of the target's body and very limited access to his mind. Anytime the possessor wants to draw upon the victim's memories or Abilities, the player must roll Charisma + Meditation (difficulty of the target's Willpower). This way, the character can access one dot at a time — no more — of the target's Abilities. Thus, a possessing ghost could give herself one dot of Linguistics, Brawl, Etiquette or any other Ability of the target's but not all at once. The possessed character now uses whichever Dexterity score is higher — the victim's or the possessing entity.

Five Vitality: The character achieves near-perfect possession. He can access any five dots of the target's Abilities at a time, at will. For example: Chet Mason's player expends five Vitality to possess a German physics professor. At will, he can use the professor's three dots of Science, plus one dot of Linguistics to understand German and one dot left over for the charming professor's Etiquette. Mason could also acquire the professor's knowledge of Russian, but only by losing the Etiquette or reducing his access to the professor's Science Trait.

The character also receives the victim's memories, but just as mortals do not hold all their memories consciously, neither do possessing spooks. The character may be quite astonished to discover what she suddenly "remembers." A spook can deliberately query the victim's memory to learn about his past.

None of the Abilities or memories gained through Puppetry endure after the possession ends. The character remembers that she used to know Spanish, knife-fighting or what happened at her victim's tenth-birthday party... but not any longer. Of course, a Skinrider can write down information that she wants to remember after possession ends.

A possessing entity can try to upgrade his degree of control by spending additional Vitality to reach the new level. For instance, a Skinrider that spent two points of Vitality to possess someone could expend three more points to gain access to the target's memories and training. Each time the character tries raising his level of control, however, the player must roll Charisma + Leadership again, which gives the victim another chance to resist the possession and evict the Skinrider.

Puppetry affects only one living, mortal target at a time, and only one spook can control a body. One Skinrider can try to evict another from a body, though. The would-be usurper must expend at least as many points of Vitality as the possessor (using Dead-Eyes while attempting a simultaneous possession lets the character make a rough estimate of how thoroughly a mortal is possessed: This requires a Perception + Vitality roll at difficulty 8). Then the usurper's player rolls Charisma + Leadership with the possessor's Willpower Trait as the difficulty. Success means the attacking entity drives out the body's current occupant; failure means a waste of Vitality points.

A ghost or projector can still see other spooks when he occupies someone else's body, and can recognize other projecting entities. The reverse is not true: A skinriding entity is not visible to other ghosts or projectors. The victim's own soul acts like a "mask" to hide the possessor. A skinriding spook, however, cannot employ any other Horrors while in someone's body, nor walk through walls, nor lend or steal Vitality. A Skinrider can, however, expend Vitality to extend his Horrors' Benefits to other characters.

A Skinrider can abandon a body any time she wants. Knocking unconscious the host body also forces out the possessor, except at the highest level of control. In that case, the character must expend one more point of Vitality when the victim goes unconscious to maintain control for another day.

A rare few mortals knowingly allow spooks to time-share their bodies. Inviting possession does not greatly change the systems for Puppetry: The soul instinctively rebels against surrender to another will. A mortal who wants a spook to possess her can attempt a Charisma + Meditation roll (difficulty 6), however, and add her successes either to the character's successes or the Vitality expenditure to offset the cost of possession. Most people require long practice or training to assist much in their own possession.

Example: A Voudon worshiper invites possession by her grandfather's ghost. The Voudonist's player rolls three successes. The Voudonist could add, say, two successes to the Vitality expended by the ghost (increasing the depth of possession) and use the remaining success to increase the duration.

At the Storyteller's option, spooks and mortals can use Puppetry to exchange Abilities. This requires willing possession at the deepest level. If both the character and the mortal then expend a point of Willpower, they can transfer one dot of an Ability from one character to the other. The recipient still must spend experience points to gain the Ability; skinriding merely enables the characters to teach each other more quickly.

While possessing a person, the character remains vulnerable to Vitality theft by other spooks and to the spiritual attacks of Spectres. On the other hand, damage to the host body does not harm the possessor's Vitality (or, in the case of skimmers, echo back to their real bodies). Actual death of the host body forms the lone exception: In that case, the Skinrider suffers the loss of a Vitality point (and one health level on a projector's real body) and is expelled from the dying body.

Death during possession is an excellent way to make another ghost, though. The dying host receives a Willpower roll (difficulty 11 minus the level of possession in Vitality points) to persist as a new ghost. The Storyteller may write up the new ghost as a full-fledged **Orpheus** character, setting his Traits according to his Shade, Lament and Nature, or simply give the ghost Vitality equal to the number of Vitality points the Skinrider invested in the possession.

Benefit: One spook cannot use Puppetry to possess another. For one Vitality, however, the character can link his mind to another member of his crucible who is within sight and transfer some of his own mental acumen. The recipient adds two dice to any Mental roll (one based on Perception, Intelligence or Wits) involved in using a Horror. The two characters also feel powerfully connected to each other, like best friends or a long-married couple. No actual information passes between them; this is communion, not communication. Some spooks enjoy the intimacy of "putting heads together," but others find it profoundly disturbing.

JUGGERNAUT

Sansky revved the engine of his Lexus just as Chet Mason burst from the stairwell. Mason ran as the Russian mobster peeled out of his parking place, denting three other cars in his haste. Sansky was too far away, though, and Chet was old. Sansky would escape....

The Hell you say! Chet silently screamed to himself. He would not let this scum get away, and only his body was old. He had to forget those limits. Mason's legs pumped and he ran twice as fast as before, three times... he pulled past Sansky's car, then turned. Chet grinned as Sansky gunned the Lexus at him. He felt a puff of humid, tropical air; the dense green of Vietnam, ghosts of memory, flickered between the concrete pillars and ranked cars of the parking garage. Mason steeled himself, willed his ectoplasmic body to feel no pain, then leapt straight at Sansky. He crashed through the windshield at Sansky who reflexively raised his arms. Mason felt the mobster's ribs break. The Lexus swerved and smashed into the concrete wall of the garage. The impact hurled Chet and Sansky back out the windshield, smack against the wall.

After a moment, Mason rolled off the crumpled hood of the car and gasped in pain. He suspected that he'd find one or two of his own ribs cracked when he returned to his body. But Sansky... the mafioski just lay quietly and bled rather a lot. The old soldier chuckled.

"Didn't wear his seatbelt," Mason said to himself.

Modern people often think of ghosts as insubstantial phantoms or a vague "presence" who can barely nudge a planchette about a Ouija board. They don't expect dead souls to beat the crap out of them. The ghosts and projectors who master Juggernaut, however, can display a quite unspiritual forcefulness — tipping automobiles, crushing bones, walking through fires and striking faster than humanly possible. To other spooks, a character employing Juggernaut seems wrapped in silver flame. If the character materializes and becomes visible, mortals see a faint flicker of this moonlight flame, a manifestation of the raw force behind the spook's driving will. Wisps cannot take Juggernaut.

Systems: Characters trigger Juggernaut as a reflexive act, which requires no dice rolls. The Horror directly affects no person or object except the spook itself.

Juggernaut augments a character's physical prowess in various ways. He can spend zero to five points of Vitality on Juggernaut effects, receiving (Vitality + 1) dots to spend on enhancing Physical Attributes:

- A dot applied to Strength simply increases the character's Strength Trait by one.
- A dot applied to Dexterity grants an extra action each Turn, without the need for splitting dice pools. The character's actual Dexterity Trait does not change; the character merely receives more opportunities to act. Characters cannot split these extra actions further into multiple actions. A spook can apply this Horror's extra actions, however, to using other Horrors for instance, using the extra actions to make several attacks using Helter Skelter but such rapid Vitality expenditure tends to limit itself.
- A dot applied to Stamina acts like one dot of armor, canceling one health level of damage against the character.

The physical enhancements last (Vitality + 1) turns. Thus, a spook could spend five Vitality to gain, say, +2 Strength, two extra actions each turn and two points of armor (six dots of physical enhancement total) for the next six turns.

At zero Vitality expenditure, a character can gain one dot in Strength, armor or extra actions. A spook cannot keep Juggernaut running constantly, however, not even at this low level. He must actively think to maintain its effects. Storytellers should assume that a character does not have Juggernaut running at the start of a scene, until the player specifically states that the character activates the Horror.

A character can end or reduce Juggernaut's physical enhancements before they run their course, but the spook does not recover any Vitality points for doing so. He can also invest more Vitality into existing Juggernaut effects. This increases the number of dots and number of turns of physical enhancement per Vitality spent. Under no circumstances, however, can a character achieve more than six dots of enhancements through Juggernaut. For instance, if a character spent three Vitality points to gain +4 Strength, he could then spend up to two more Vitality to gain +2 more Strength, two extra actions each turn or two dots of armor, or one dot in two separate enhancements — but no more, until this use of Juggernaut runs its course. If a character insists on spending more Vitality, he can continue raising one enhancement, but at cost of lowering others. For instance, the character could prematurely give up extra actions to gain more armor.

This Horror is most obviously useful for combat with mortals or other spooks. A spook can also employ



Zero Vitality: One dot in Strength, one extra action or armor rating one for one turn. One Vitality: Two dots in Strength, extra actions or armor for two turns. Two Vitality: Three dots in Strength, extra actions or armor for three turns. Three Vitality: Four dots in Strength, extra actions or armor for four turns. Four Vitality: Five dots in Strength, extra actions or armor for five turns. Five Vitality: Six dots in Strength, extra actions or armor for six turns.

augmented Strength for purposes ranging from moving the furniture for a loved one to collapsing an enemy's house. Extra actions enable a character to perform any task more quickly — at zero Vitality, a ghost or projecting entity can do *anything* twice as fast the living. Armor lets a character display even greater invulnerability to harm than normal for their kind, without the need to dematerialize.

Benefit: For one Vitality, the donor may lend some of his physical prowess to a beneficiary who is within sight. For the next turn, the recipient adds two dice to any Strength, Dexterity or Stamina-based rolls used to determine a Horror's success. The donor actually throws some of his silver aura to the recipient. When granting this benefit, the donor feels a surge of tension and excitement like the "sympathetic exertion" a sports fan feels when watching a really good game.

<u>WISP HORRORS</u> UNEARTHLY REPOSE

The two security guards were bored, but not at all sleepy. One of them had been chugging gas station cappuccino for the last hour, and while he might require a piss-break sometime soon, he sure wasn't going to just doze off. Never as easy as the movies, Blink thought. He sauntered up to the guards and raised his hands in front of their faces, willing himself to become visible. The guards fought it — Blink saw their brains warring with their hearts while they tried figuring out why they wanted to follow the glowing lights — but it was a quick fight. Blink backed up, leading the guards slowly away from their posts, while the other agents, still solid, crept forth from around the corner. Follow the light, boys, Blink thought. Nothing else to see.

The character has an allure that others can't help but gravitate toward. A Wisp can use this power in several ways, from becoming the life of a party (so to speak) to actually forcing onlookers to follow him. When Unearthly Repose is active, the Wisp's gauze glows with an eerie, unearthly light. The light doesn't necessarily grow brighter while becoming more compelling, and it barely produces enough actual illumination by which to see. The light is barely noticeable unless the Wisp is using the power to beckon an onlooker; if he is simply

making himself more charismatic and entrancing, the light is present, but so faint that only someone actively looking would spot it. To the Wisp, it feels as though his own aura, essence or mere force of personality is reaching out to others and ensnaring them as if in a net. Poltergeists may not take this Horror.

System: Unless the Wisp manifests, he can use Unearthly Repose only on other spooks. If the character appears to the living, however, both they and spooks are affected normally. The character may activate Unearthly Repose as a reflexive action at zero Vitality cost, but more impressive displays of the power require a full action.

As stated above, Unearthly Repose causes the character to glow. Any character who sees the glow becomes entranced by it. This can have several effects.

First, the Wisp can use his supernatural charisma to cajole and persuade anyone with whom he speaks; this adds a number of dice equal to the Vitality spent to any non-threatening Social rolls made during the scene. The number of Vitality spent determines the strength of the allure; low (zero or one point) expenditure indicates the viewer simply finds the Wisp intriguing or attractive; medium (two or three points) expenditure means the character views the Wisp as a trusted friend; high (four or five points) expenditure means the victim will not refuse any reasonable request that the character makes and, in fact, views the Wisp as a confidant or lover. This application affects anyone looking at the character.

Second, the Wisp can use Unearthly Repose to calm an agitated or angry onlooker. The light acts to soothe the viewer, lulling her into a stupor if she stares at the light long enough. In game terms, for each turn a target looks at the glowing Wisp, her initiative rating drops by one and she adds one to the difficulty of any violent or strenuous action. This effect is possible only if the player spends two or more Vitality on the Horror; higher expenditures simply make it more difficult to look away (see below).

Finally, the character may induce the effect for which legendary will-o'-the-wisps are renowned (or feared) — she may cause a target to follow the light no matter where it leads. The amount of Vitality the player spends determines how long the power lasts and to what lengths a viewer goes to follow it (see below). This power affects anyone who can see the Wisp, Spectres included.

A Wisp can warn allies in advance that he intends to activate the power but cannot vary its effects on given viewers — all who see the glow are affected equally. A viewer who is aware of what is happening can spend a Willpower point and roll Willpower (difficulty 5 + the number of Vitality spent on the Horror) to look away and break the spell. This is true for all facets of Unearthly Repose. A target who successfully resists cannot be affected by the same Wisp's use of this power for one scene, unless the player spends additional Vitality.

The Horror lasts for one scene unless the Wisp chooses to terminate it early. During that time, the Wisp can undertake other actions, but loses two dice from all pools while keeping Unearthly Repose active.

Zero Vitality: The viewer takes a step toward the Wisp but is not compelled any further.

One Vitality: The viewer follows the Wisp slowly, and stops if distracted in any way.

Two Vitality: The viewer follows the light, ignoring any audible distraction but stopping if touched or otherwise startled (a hand waved in front of the face may be enough, at Storyteller's discretion).

Three Vitality: The viewer concentrates solely on the light and stops only if struck.

Four Vitality: The victim follows the light to the exclusion of all else. If someone physically stops the victim from following the Wisp, the victim will fight to free himself. If the victim loses sight of the Wisp, however, the effect weakens (the victim may roll Willpower, difficulty 8, to regain her senses).

Five Vitality: The victim continues following the Wisp to exclusion of all other concerns, including personal safety. If stopped, she fights to free herself to follow the light. Even if she cannot see the light, she walks in its general direction until the Wisp chooses to terminate the effect.

Benefit: The Wisp can use his allure to boost the effectiveness of any character's Social Horror. This costs the character one Vitality and adds two dice to any one Horror using one of the Social Attributes (Charisma, Manipulation or Appearance). For example, the Wisp could add this benefit to the beneficiary's Forebode Horror, adding a nimbus of light to the Banshee as she employs her eerie voice. Unlike other applications of Unearthly Repose, the intended target need not see the beneficiary using the yoked Horror for said character to enjoy this Benefit. The recipient using the yoked Horror glows faintly, much like the Wisp himself when using Unearthly Repose, and feels a rush of confidence and support from the Wisp.

STORM-WENDING

Blink rushed down the hallway, wishing he could dim the light constantly playing around his hands. He was fairly sure the T&S monkeys could see him anyway, but carrying two flashlights didn't help his mindset. He rounded the corner and came to a dead end. Glancing about helplessly, he realized that even if he walked through the wall, he might not have enough strength to deal with whatever was in the next room. The two goons rounded the bend and adjusted their goggles before raising their weapons. "Okay, guys," Blink raised his hands and dug them into the cracks in the universe. "Nothing up my sleeve." They fired. He vanished.

As they were wondering whether they'd destroyed him completely, he slipped through the door behind them and out of the building.

This Horror allows the Wisp to perceive tiny fissures in the Stormwall, and to move through those fissures almost instantly. In effect, the character teleports, taking



advantage of the strange effect on time that seems to occur in these cracks. Unlike true teleportation, which would be instantaneous, Storm-Wending takes place over a matter of seconds. Still, this Horror is invaluable for escaping tight situations, getting the drop on opponents or convincing targets they're dealing with more than one spook.

When a Wisp uses Storm-Wending, she feels as though she is digging her fingers into the very fabric of reality. Some ghosts liken the sensation to dipping their fingers into boiling water and then immediately into ice water, but projectors don't feel anything so dramatic. Indeed, sleepers and skimmers feel nothing but a slight shiver while passing through the byways. Others who observe this effect see the character grow impossibly thin and then ooze into her surroundings, only to flow outward at another point. Poltergeists may not take this Horror.

System: The character may transport herself nearly instantly from one point to another. The distance is determined by how many points of Vitality the player spends. Using Storm-Wending is a full action; no other actions are possible during a turn in which a character employs this Horror. The character, however, may continue using it over multiple turns, as long as the player continues spending any necessary Vitality.

Vitality expenditures as they relate to distance are as follows:

Zero Vitality: The character transports herself alone and moves only a few feet away. The character may use this facet of her power to augment a dodge; the character doubles her Dexterity when dodging through use of this Horror.

One Vitality: The character may transport herself up to 10 yards away.

Two Vitality: The character may transport herself up to 100 feet away.

Three Vitality: The character may transport herself up to 100 yards away (if her destination is outside her line of sight, she must be familiar with the destination to appear there).

Four Vitality: The character may appear anywhere within a 1,000-foot radius of her current location, provided she has seen the destination once before.

Five Vitality: The character may appear anywhere within a half-mile radius of her current location, provided she has seen the destination at least once before.

By spending three or more points, the Wisp may affect other characters as well as (or instead of) herself. At three Vitality, the Wisp can transport up to two people; at four, she affects three; at five, she affects five including herself, if she goes along; otherwise, it's five other people.

When transporting multiple people, the maximum range of the power is 100 feet, regardless of the Vitality expended. Others traveling via Storm-Wending feel cold and raw afterwards, as though momentarily caught in a vicious rainstorm while naked.

Example: Backed against a wall by Spectres, Blink decides the crucible is better off running away to fight another day. He can affect five people at maximum; lucky, since his crucible has five members, including himself. His player spends five Vitality, and the crucible disappears into the interstices between the Stormwall and the world, reappearing outside the haunted house (fortunately, the back door was only 100 feet away).

Ghosts and projecting entities *cannot* use Storm-Wending on living targets; it functions only on spooks. If a Wisp wishes to use the Horror on an unwilling target, both the player and the target roll Dexterity + Intuition (difficulty 7); the player must equal or exceed the target's successes to affect her. Normal rules about destinations apply when transporting others; a Wisp can't simply send a target "away" — she must specify a destination she has personally seen within 100 feet.

Characters using Storm-Wending to travel within line of sight may travel in any direction, including straight up. Since the character can use this Horror over successive turns, it is possible to "fly" using Storm-Wending, provided the character spends Vitality each turn. If the character does not wish to spend Vitality, remember he is moving only approximately five feet per turn, and likely falls at least a foot before the next application of Storm-Wending begins. This means the character ascends at roughly one foot per second, blinking in and out of visibility all the while.

Remember too that since the character can commit to no other action on a turn when using Storm-Wending, it isn't wise to appear directly in front of an opponent in combat. It is possible to appear in an advantageous position, however; a player using Storm-Wending to position her character well in a fight may roll Perception + Alertness (difficulty 6; this roll is reflexive) and add the number of successes to the character's initiative rating next turn.

Finally, under no circumstance can the character reappear with a solid object inside an opponent, or teleport the opposition into solid mass.

Benefit: The Wisp can lend her control and perceptions of space (as well as her unusual relationship with time) to another character momentarily, allowing the recipient to take the greatest advantage of position, timing and Vitality on a yoked Horror. For one Vitality, the donor may bestow upon a beneficiary a glimpse of the byways, allowing her to derive the most from her Horror. The recipient's player may re-roll any two dice on the Horror roll, provided the roll did not botch. To the target, this manifests as a sudden chilling sensation, followed by a split second of perfect clarity.

John Carruthers watched from his car as the man — Steven something-or-other — walked from the parking lot toward the building. He strode past a pair of women outside on a smoke break; they paid no heed to Steven.

John emerged from his car, leaving his body behind. Anyone look—ing would think he was napping behind the wheel, and that was fine. He followed Steven in, but since opening the door wasn't an option, he simply walked through it. Moving through glass always felt cold, no matter how many hands left oily little stains on it, no matter how long a window stood in the sun... it always felt cold.

John was used to cold. Hospital floors were cold. The needles were cold. Even the doorknobs always felt cold, like they had been deliberately chilled just before he arrived.

He walked through the lobby invisible and followed the murmurs to Steven's cubicle. He'd been here before with his crucible, gleaning what information he could from Steven's files. There wasn't much. Steven was the kind of guy who left his work at work, and his home life at home. John smirked. No wonder he was confused.

Steven sat at his desk, typing away. John looked over his shoulder and peered at the screen. It was pure gibberish to him — some spread—sheet program for which he'd never had a use; he had always done the books for his shop by hand. John tapped Steven on the shoulder. Please, let him remember me this time.

"Yes?"

"Steven? Remember me? It's John Carruthers." Pause. No recognition. "Blink."

The blank looked lasted another few seconds, and then something inside Steven woke up. "Oh, yeah, Blink. The name's really John, huh?"

John smiled. The smile was artificial, but winning enough that Steven saw him as a dear friend. "Yeah."

Steven had the look of a man at a high school reunion, unsure of who he should recognize and why. "So, what's up?"

John nodded over the cubicle wall. "So, the thing is, man, I was talking to the receptionist out there. What's her name?"

Steven smiled with a sheepish twinkle. "Beth."

"Yeah, Beth. I was talking to her about you. You know she says that if she had it to do over again, she'd have accepted that date you of-fered her?"

Steven's eyes grew a little wider.

"She never really thought of you as anything but a co-worker, and I think you took her by surprise a little."

"Maybe I should ask her again?"

Blink shook his head. Now was the hard part. "No. I think she's seeing someone now. But she respects you, and she does find you attractive."

"Oh, yeah?" Steven grinned as though he'd just received a raise and a blow job at the same time. Blink was a performer, not a con artist, but he knew when to let the mark have his moment. Everybody has their time in the sun, from the guy backstage who works the mirrors to the little girl volunteering from the audience. Steven had a crush on Beth that went back more than a year, and she'd shot him out of the saddle. Hearing that she regretted it — and, more importantly, that she felt he was worth the time of day — was probably better news than Steven had received in years.

It was bullshit. Beth hadn't even attended Steven's funeral. But he didn't need to know that. Hell, he didn't even realize he was dead.

Another of Steven's co-workers passed by the cubicle's opening and shivered, not from actual cold, but from the presence of ghosts. Blink saw it all the time — he induced that shiver, and he wasn't even dead yet. Idly, he wondered if hospitals were really cold or not.

The thought snapped him back to the matter at hand. John watched as the colors on Steven's clothes grew a little brighter. In an instant he became a bit more alive, and a bit further from life, as one little chain dropped away, one less chain to keep him here. One more and he'll probably disappear entirely, thought Blink. Can't have that, not yet.

"So, Steven," he said. "I understand you changed the password on the accounting software right before you...asked her out?"

CHAPTER THREE: CHARACTER CREATION



Welcome to Orpheus. Hope you survive the experience.

- Typical greeting for newbies

Natalie: What's the last thing that you do

remember?

Leonard Shelby: My wife ...

Natalie: That's sweet.

Leonard Shelby: ...dying.

To play **Orpheus**, you must first create a character, an alter ego through which you interact with the game world and take your part in the story. Your character is like a protagonist in a novel or movie, except that when the story ends you move on to the next adventure, and the next. Your character grows while you play her, possibly becoming something you never expected.

This chapter describes how to create an **Orpheus** character, beginning with a general concept and translating that idea into the Traits and statistics used in the game. These numbers are not particularly inspiring or thought-provoking — it's hard to evoke a compelling image when stating: "My character has four dots in Charisma." But these numbers serve as a starting point to help you define your character's strengths and weaknesses in objective terms. These numbers will also serve when you need to determine if your character's actions are successful or not. A manipulative character, for instance, will have a better time persuading the cop to let him go about his (rather questionable) business late at night than someone who isn't manipulative.

It's best to create a character with assistance and supervision from the Storyteller. When you know what the game you'll participate in is like, you can more easily design a character who fits in. In fact, it's best to discuss with the other players and Storyteller what they expect of the game so everyone's characters can fit together without much fuss.

TRAITS

When you set out to create your character, you should have a general concept in mind: Where he lives, how he grew up, what he loves and hates, etc. These are what make each character truly alive and unique. To play the character, however, you must first give them *Traits*. You can't decide your character is intelligent and a fast thinker without assigning dots to Intelligence and Wits, and he can't be devastatingly handsome if you don't put any dots into Appearance. You should assign Traits in a manner supporting the character's concept and intended role — a smooth talker should have Charisma or Manipulation along with Subterfuge, to make him useful when the group needs someone to fast-talk their way out of a situation. On the other hand, he may rely on a companion for heavy-duty physical work (like combat).

Traits are described in numerical terms, with ratings from one to five dots (Vitality, Spite and Willpower are exceptions, running up to 10 dots). Each rating represents the character's capability in that particular Trait. Trait ratings are similar to scores critics might give a movie or restaurant — no dots at all is abysmal (or, in some Traits, even subhuman), while five is legendary (probably the best in the world), with one to four dots

ranging between. These ratings are very important when it comes to rolling dice (see Chapter Four for specifics).

GETTING STARTED

Orpheus character creation is based upon five basic concepts. Keep the following in mind when creating the character you want to play.

- You can make a character from any nation, of any age and from any cultural background, subject to the Storyteller's approval. All characters, however, begin the game as new recruits who have only recently been hired by The Orpheus Group (though Storytellers may certainly change this approach). They know little about the twilight world they've entered, other than what Orpheus told them.
- The character creation process is designed to help you define your persona and provide you with the means for that character to work within the rules. This does not mean the numbers are more important than the concept; your character's Traits should support and strengthen your concept. The only way you can truly bring the character to life for yourself, the other players and the Storyteller is through roleplay. Keep that in mind when designing your character.
- The Orpheus character creation system is point-based: You (the player) receive points to apply to each part of the character (Attributes, Abilities, Advantages). After assigning these points, you receive a pool of bonus points to further personalize and round out your character. Note that even with bonus points, you probably won't have enough points to purchase everything you want. This is fine. Your character will grow as you play him over time.
- A Trait of one is poor while a Trait of five distinguishes your character as among the most accomplished in her field. If you have one dot in an Ability, your character is inexperienced or simply not very good at it. This doesn't mean your character is useless just because she has one dot in Strength. Instead, consider it an opportunity to further flesh out your character a one dot Trait can be as defining as any five dot Trait.
- It is very important to create a character that fits into the group. You can't expect the other players to tolerate someone who just won't mesh or work with the crucible. If your character's behavior disrupts a story, the Storyteller or other players may ask you to modify how you play or to create a new character who will fit in better. In the often dangerous world of **Orpheus**, mission success (as well as survival) often depends on a group's ability to cooperate.

COMMON TRAITS AND TERMS

Orpheus characters comprise the following Traits: **Name:** The character's name.

Player: The name of the player portraying the charac-

ter in question. In all likelihood, that's you!

Chronicle: A series of linked stories in which the character participates. Your Storyteller will provide you with the name of the chronicle.

Nature: Your character's "true" personality — who she is deep down.

Demeanor: The personality your character presents to the world.

Shade e: Your character's Shade reflects her overall approach to the world and the powers she derives from it.

Lament: Your Lament identifies what type of being

your character is, whether a living projector (skimmer and sleeper) or a dead ghost (spirit or hue).

Role: Your character's profession or lifestyle leading to her current condition.

Attributes: Attributes define your character's inborn aptitudes and potential.

Abilities: Abilities are those proficiencies your character possesses intuitively or has learned.

Advantages: A catchall term for the numerous benefits a character has over "normal" folk. Advantages

refer to a collection of three other Traits. *Horrors* refer to the supernatural powers a character possesses as a result of her ghostly nature. *Stains* refer to physical

manifestations of a character's inner darkness. Backgrounds define the character's material assets and social network.

Vitality: A measure of your character's spiritual strength and health.

Willpower: This trait reflects your character's inner drive and desire to succeed at tasks she undertakes.

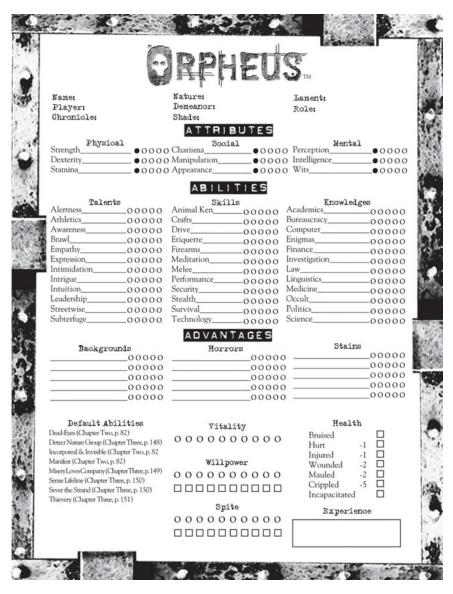
Spite: A measure of your character's inner rage and hatred.

Health trait measures how much physical injury the character has suffered.

Default Abilities: Those powers naturally inher-

ent to all Shades and Laments. Those found in Chapter Two (pp. 82): Incorporeal & Invisible, Manifest and Dead-Eyes. Those in this chapter (pp. 148-151): Detect Nature Group, Misery Loves Company, Sense Lifeline, Sever the Strand and Thievery.

Experience: You live, you survive (maybe even die) and you learn. This represents how much you've learned upon becoming a ghost or learning to project. All characters begin with their experience Trait at zero but can use accrued experience to later buy new Traits.



THE STORYTELLER'S ROLE IN CHARACTER CREATION

As the Storyteller, you should guide your players through character creation. When your players arrive for the first session, discuss the game's basic premise and themes (specifically those you wish to explore). It's helpful to write a style sheet, a document that describes where you'd like to start and where you'd like the chronicle to progress over time (you don't have to reveal your actual plans for stories, simply offer guidance on the kinds of adventures you want to run). If any player is unfamiliar with **Orpheus**, spend time guiding him through the setting and rules basics. You don't need to bring them up to speed on everything (a new character won't know much more than the new player does). Try to keep matters as simple as possible and give the players room to discover the system's intricacies on their own.

First, give the players each a character sheet and give them a minute to look it over and ask questions. Then, explain the character creation process step by step; give the players time to inquire about matters and answer them as clearly as possible. A little patience in the beginning will spare you from frustration and misunderstanding later on. Be sure to explain what the Traits mean and how they define a character's abilities.

Before players create their characters, discuss the kind of group they'd like to play and which role each character might fulfill. It's not necessary to think about it in terms of "one member of each Shade" or "we need a wheelman." Consider what the characters will do in the group and why they joined together. Encourage the players to give their characters hooks to bind them as a unit.

Spend the entire session creating characters... don't rush the players. Give them time to make complete, fleshand-blood (well, as flesh-and-blood as a ghost can be) characters with personalities, goals, hopes and dreams. You don't want undeveloped caricatures. Once players finish creating their characters, spend the remaining time running their preludes. A prelude is a short session with the player, relating the story of her character's life up to the present, including family life, important events and her entry into the world of spooks. Preludes will be your players' first exposure to your chronicle, so make them memorable and interesting. Once you've run all the preludes, run a prelude for the group as a whole, an occasion that brings the characters together and gives them a reason strong enough to forge a more lasting bond between them. You can find more information on preludes later in this chapter.

ADDITIONAL CONCERNS

In addition to the above, there are three other matters to keep in mind while creating your character.



CHARACTER CREATION PROCESS

• Step One: Character Concept

Choose role, Shade, Lament, Nature and Demeanor. Record Lament traits.

• Step Two: Select Attributes

Note that all Attributes start with one dot automatically before you assign any dots.

Prioritize the three categories: Physical, Social, Mental (6/4/3)

Rate Physical Traits: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina Rate Social Traits: Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance

Rate Mental Traits: Perception, Intelligence, Wits

• Step Three: Select Abilities

Prioritize the three categories: Talents, Skills, Knowledges (11/7/4)

Select Talents, Skills and Knowledges.

No Ability may be higher than 3 at this stage.

• Step Four: Record Advantages

Record Automatic Shade Horror

Select Backgrounds (2 standard + 2 Orpheus; when applicable)

Select Stains (3)

• Step Five: Finishing Touches

Record starting Vitality, Willpower and Spite (as determined by Shade + Nature)

Spend Freebie Points (15)

Vitality can never exceed nine with most characters and seven with hues.

SHADES

• Banshee: Oracles who possess a natural insight into the psychological and the metaphysical.

Automatic Horror: Wail

Prohibited Horror: Helter Skelter & Congeal

Vitality: 5 Willpower: 3 Spite: 0

• Haunter: Comfortable in a variety of environments and situations, these characters possess an innate empathy for objects and locations.

Automatic Horror: Inhabit

Prohibited Horror: Forebode & Wail

Vitality: 5 Willpower: 4 Spite: 1

• **Poltergeist:** Embodiments of frustration and anger who channel their rage into destructive outbursts.

Automatic Horror: Helter Skelter

Prohibited Horror: Unearthly Repose & Storm-Wending

Vitality: 5 Willpower: 5 Spite: 2

• **Skinrider:** Natural leaders who revel in mental and physical control.

Automatic Horror: Puppetry

Prohibited Horror: Currently Unknown

Vitality: 4 Willpower: 6 Spite: 2

• Wisp: Tricksters who weave deceptions with charm and guile.

Automatic Horrors: Unearthly Repose Prohibited Horror: Puppetry & Juggernaut Vitality: 4 Willpower: 4 Spite: 0

LAMENTS

• **Hue** (Ghost) — Weaker ghosts created through the use of the drug pigment.

Bonus: Hues can bring forth any of their three Stains and use them without penalty for a single scene.

Weakness: Hues may never exceed their starting Vitality rating and have a maximum ceiling of seven. A character's starting Vitality rating may increase during character creation through freebie points, but will never increase using experience points.

• **Skimmer** (Projector) — Flesh and blood individuals who can project their souls from their body at will.

Bonus: Skimmers regenerate Vitality at a rate of one point per hour spent resting in their physical bodies.

Weakness: Skimmers must spend one Vitality point per hour outside their body or suffer one automatic level of bashing damage. Any damage inflicted on a skimmer's soul causes bashing damage to his physical body rather than Vitality rating even though skimmers can soak damage better (difficulty 5). Additionally, skimmers must purchase Meditation to project within a single turn; otherwise, they need one minute to project.

• Sleeper (Projector) — Flesh and blood individuals capable of projecting their souls from their bodies while kept in cryogenic suspension.

Bonus: Sleepers may shunt unwanted Spite points into their physical body and dispense with it when healing.

Weakness: Sleepers are unable to return to their bodies until someone thaws them out and resuscitates them. Sleepers, like skimmers, can regenerate Vitality in the way that skimmers can only when back in their revived bodies. Otherwise they do so as ghosts.

• Spirit (Ghost) — Naturally occurring ghosts bound here by personal matters and concerns.

Bonus: Spirits possess five (5) additional freebie points to spend during character creation or when changing to this Lament.

Weakness: Spirits have a free-roaming Spectre nemesis hell-bent on destroying them and their lives. The creature can be destroyed for a time, but it eventually returns.

ARCHETYPES | NATURE AND DEMEANOR |

• Addict — You are hooked on something or someone.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +1 Spite: +3

• Architect — You build a better future.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +3 Spite: +1

• Autocrat — You need control.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +2 Spite: +2

• Avant-Garde — You crave the new and the exciting.

Vitality: +2 Willpower: +2 Spite: +1

• Barbarian — Civilization is the crutch of the weak.

Vitality: +3 Willpower: +0 Spite: +2

• Bon Vivant — Existence is for pleasure.

Vitality: +3 Willpower: +0 Spite: +2

• Bravo — Strength is all that matters.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +1 Spite: +3

• Bumpkin—Common sense and practical wisdom are best.

Vitality: +2 Willpower: +2 Spite: +1

• Bureaucrat — Rules keep the world from collapsing into chaos.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +3 Spite: +1

• Caregiver — You are a wellspring of compassion.

Vitality: +3 Willpower: +1 Spite: +1

• Celebrant — You exist for your own passion.

Vitality: +3 Willpower: +0 Spite: +1

• Child—Youdemand that others give you what you want.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +1 Spite: +3

• Competitor — You strive to be the best.

Vitality: +2 Willpower: +2 Spite: +1

• Conformist — You follow and assist.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +1 Spite: +3

• Conniver — Brains over Brawn.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +1 Spite: +3

vitality. 11 willpower. 11 Spite: 15

• Critic — Pointing outflaws makes it possible to correct them.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +2 Spite: +2

• Curmudgeon — Nothing is worthwhile.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +2 Spite: +2

• **Dabbler** — Easily distracted by new ideas and rarely finishing any one thing.

Vitality: +3 Willpower: +1 Spite: +1

• Defender—Youstandguard over that for which you care.

Vitality: +3 Willpower: +2 Spite: +0

 $\bullet \, Deviant {\longleftarrow} \, You \, exist for no \, one \'spleasure \, but \, your \, own.$

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +2 Spite: +2

• Director — You oversee what must be done.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +3 Spite: +1

• Dreamer — You aspire to lofty heights.

Vitality: +2 Willpower: +1 Spite: +2

• Explorer — Life is a never—ending adventure.

Vitality: +3 Willpower: +1 Spite: +1

• **Fanatic** — The cause is all that matters.

Vitality: +2 Willpower: +2 Spite: +1

• Follower — You look for someone else to take charge.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +1 Spite: +3

• Gambler — You play the odds in all things.

<u>Vitality: +2 Willpower:</u> +1 Spite: +2

• Gallant — You seek to be the center of attention.

Vitality: +2 Willpower: +2 Spite: +1

• Grotesque — You delight in disgusting others.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +1 Spite: +3

• Judge — Balance, truth and justice are your quests.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +2 Spite: +2

• Leader — When you speak, you expect others to listen.

Vitality: +2 Willpower: +2 Spite: +1

• Loner — You go your own way.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +2 Spite: +2

• Martyr — You suffer for the greater good.

Vitality: +2 Willpower: +2 Spite: +1

• Masochist — You test your limits every day.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +2 Spite: +2

• Mediator — You always try to reach an agreement.

Vitality: +2 Willpower: +1 Spite: +2

• Mentor — You try to teach others.

Vitality: +3 Willpower: +1 Spite: +1

• Monster — You are damned, so you may as well act like it.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +2 Spite: +2

• Pedagogue — You save others through knowledge.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +2 Spite: +2

• Penitent — You seek to atone for past acts.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +3 Spite: +1

• Perfectionist — Nothing is ever good enough.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +3 Spite: +1

• Rake — Reveling in the public display of the

illicit, the forbidden or disgraceful.

Vitality: +2 Willpower: +1 Spite: +2

• Rebel — You follow no one's rules but your own.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +2 Spite: +2

• Riddler — The truth is best obscured.

Vitality: +2 Willpower: +2 Spite: +1

• Rogue — Those who can, win; those who can't, lose. You can.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +2 Spite: +2

• Scientist — Any problem can be solved with logic and deduction.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +3 Spite: +1

• Socialite — The social whirl is both a battlefield and a workshop.

Vitality: +2 Willpower: +2 Spite: +1

• **Survivor** — You withstand anything the universe throws at you.

Vitality: +2 Willpower: +2 Spite: +1

• Thrillseeker — Life is not worth living unless it's on the edge.

Vitality: +3 Willpower: +0 Spite: +2

• Traditionalist — Tried and true is the best way.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +2 Spite: +2

• Trickster — Laughter eases the pain.

Vitality: +2 Willpower: +2 Spite: +1

• Visionary — You see the world for what it could be, rather than what it is.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +3 Spite: +1

• Wretch — You are worthless.

Vitality: +1 Willpower: +1 Spite: +3

HORRORS

- Congeal The power to create weapons from one's own gauze. Requires Helter Skelter.
- Forebode Allows the user to gain limited glimpses into the past and future. Requires Wail.
- Helter Skelter The power to manipulate and move objects. Automatic to Poltergeists.
- **Inhabit** The ability to possess and control inanimate objects and buildings. Automatic to Haunters.
- Juggernaut Enables the user to bolster his physical power when manifesting. Requires Puppetry.
- Puppetry Enables the user to possess and control humans. Automatic to Skinriders.
- Storm-Wending Transports the user from one location to another almost instantly. Requires Unearthly Repose.
- Unearthly Repose Creates a charismatic aura around the user. Automatic to Wisps.
- Wail Allows the user to elicit emotional responses or cause damage with his voice. Automatic to Banshees.

• Witch's Nimbus — The ability to generate and discharge fire and electricity. Requires Inhabit.

BACKGROUNDS

- Allies Aides and friends who help in tasks.
- Arsenal Weapons and equipment at hand.
- Artifact An object that takes on fantastic properties when in ghost form.
- Contacts Information sources and friends in useful places.
- Destiny Your character has a fate appointed by higher (or lower) powers.
- Detective License The power to gain information legally for investigations and research.
- Health Insurance Financial aid to offset the costs of medical treatment.
 - Influence Your pull in the world around you.
 - Mentor A teacher and instructor.
- Memorial You are dead but not forgotten, and can draw Vitality from this.
- Patron Someone who aids and protects the character in exchange for services rendered.
 - Personal Trainer A one-on-one instructor.
- Reincarnate Past life experiences and flashes of previous Abilities.
 - Resources Material goods and money.
- Status Standing and rank in Orpheus (or in some other organization).

FREEBIE POINTS

Trait	Cost
Attribute	5 per dot
Ability	2 per dot
Shade Horror	7 points
Non-Shade Horror	10 points
Background	1 per dot
Vitality	5 per dot
Willpower	3 per dot

OUTSIDE ORPHEUS

While this chapter operates on the assumption that characters work for — or at least with — Orpheus, there are other options available. Orpheus's two primary rivals are Terrel & Squib and NextWorld Inc. Beyond this level, other, much smaller organizations also employ projectors and ghosts. A crucible could, conceivably, work for any of these factions. In addition, it is also possible for a collection of independent characters to form a crucible. Such characters can encompass a wide range of backgrounds, from pigment addicts and coma victims to shamans and naturally occurring high Vitality spirits.

Characters working for another organized group follow identical character creation steps to standard Orpheus characters. The only major difference is in their employer. Most likely, this factor will influence the character's Background. Terrel & Squib typically employs agents more interested in flash than substance. It specifically targets young employees and caters to the world's rich and elite as a sort of savvy, cutting-edge firm like the innumerable dot.com businesses. NextWorld members are almost exclusively ex-military (with combat experience) or former intelligence operatives. The roles, Abilities and Backgrounds chosen by such characters should reflect this.

With independent characters, the most pressing question is how the group actually meets. While it is possible they all met in a bar and decided to investigate ghosts, this scenario is rather unlikely. If you wish to pursue the independent route, we recommend that before character creation even begins, all the players, including the Storyteller, hash out the details of just how this group joined forces, why they remain in contact and what it is they do. Independent characters must also deal with the issue of Backgrounds. While characters without any official backing still receive four dots to spend on Backgrounds, certain Orpheus Backgrounds may not be suitable for such characters. The Storyteller is the final arbitrator of which Orpheus Backgrounds are and are not available to independent characters.

Terrel & Squib, NextWorld Inc. and other organizations and subcultures dealing with the spirit world are detailed in Chapter Five: Storytelling the Dead.

- Life and Death: Your character has had multiple near-death experiences in his lifetime. For the normal person, even a single near-death experience is highly unusual. Consider what sort of lifestyles and circumstances would lead to this rather unusual state of affairs. Did your character engage in an extremely risky occupation or lifestyle? Or was poor health or even extraordinary bad luck the cause of his repeated brushes with death? Is your character even still alive, or did he finally experience something he couldn't come back from?
- Orpheus: Unless the Storyteller and players decide to center their chronicle around a different organization, your character probably works for The Orpheus Group. Consider just how he came in contact with the group and what his relationship with the organization entails. What does he offer Orpheus, and more importantly, what does Orpheus offer him?
- Crucible: Crucibles are bound together in a way that transcends simple social ties. Consider how you met the other members of your crucible, and just why it is Orpheus brought you all together. We strongly recommend the entire group discuss this issue during character creation. For more on crucibles, see p. 133 below.

STEP ONE: CHARACTER CONCEPT

Before filling in a single dot on your character sheet, you should consider a concept. You don't need to know all the details of the character's life at this point, just a general sense for her identity. Decide on something unique and interesting you will enjoy playing for the long haul. While progressing through the character creation process, you may change or adjust this concept to suit your needs or wants, but it gives you a starting point. This initial hook might be as complex as "My

WORKING WITHOUT A NET

Some players may, for various reasons, feel uncomfortable with the idea of roles. Be it because you can't find a role to suit the exact concept you want or because you are already well experienced with the Storyteller system and see no need for them, the solution to this problem is fairly simple: Don't use them. Roles are provided primarily to make character creation faster and simpler for those who desire it. If you don't want to use them, good for you. It's your game and, obviously, you can do what you want with it. No one from White Wolf is going to kick down your door and take away your copy of **Orpheus** for not using roles. We're all much too busy hunting down people who continue using Mage Second Edition.

character was raised as a staunch Catholic and believes that by helping people as a member of Orpheus, she'll eventually work her way out of Purgatory." Or it could be something as simple as "Someone similar to Anthony Michael Hall in *The Dead Zone* series." This concept should be unique and interesting enough to satisfy you and the Storyteller.

ROLE

Role reflects your character's previous occupation or lifestyle. Ideally, this role is a dangerous one, which resulted in at least one or more previous near-death experiences for your character. While your character's role is not the same as his concept, the two should be tied together. A list of roles is provided in this chapter, starting on p. 136. Each includes suggested guidelines for your character's attribute priorities and ability selections. Remember, these guidelines are only suggestions and not ironclad requirements.

SHADE

A pivotal aspect of any Orpheus character is his Shade. A character's Shade is a reflection of how he views and interacts with the world around him. This outlook, in turn, influences the powers a character can and cannot develop, as well as his Base Vitality, Willpower and Spite. Presently, Orpheus identifies only five specific categories of Shades but suspects there may be more they have yet to find.

While members of each Shade have certain aspects in common, remember that your character is an individual who might break with the Shade's stereotypical image. For example, Poltergeists are typically angry about something, but while one character may be extremely irate at having died before she was ready, a second character's rage may derive from his righteous indignation at the perceived injustices of the world. Likewise, while Banshees generally possess a certain level of insight, one character may be a scientist with a keen understanding of the universe's mysteries, while another is a priest with an intuitive comprehension of the human soul. When selecting a Shade, consider what would lead your character to develop that outlook and approach to the world, as well as how that attitude manifests within him as an individual.

Shades are detailed on pp. 81-92.

LAMENT

Equally pivotal is a character's Lament. Whereas Shade reflects a character's approach to life and what he is capable of accomplishing as a ghost or projected entity, Lament reflects how he takes gauze form. Orpheus' investigations of the paranormal led them down several different avenues. As a result, they discovered four basic types of spooks, broken down into two broad classifications.



The first are projectors, individuals able to temporarily project their souls outside of their bodies to become, in essence, living ghosts. The methods used to achieve soul projection vary, but they fall into one of two categories. Skimmers are those projectors who can leave their bodies almost at will. The methods for accomplishing this feat are frequently unique to the individual, but most involve some variation on or combination of meditation and pure willpower. Some initially use drugs to accomplish the same means, but eventually, the need for this crutch fades. Sleepers are those projectors who can leave their bodies only after being placed into an artificial state of suspended animation. This state, and with it the character's "tour-of duty" as a projected entity, is typically scheduled for only two to four weeks, but could, in theory, last a decade or more.

The second Lament classification is ghosts, the souls of the dead who remain behind to haunt the living. Ghosts also come in two flavors. *Hues* are those ghosts who used the drug pigment at one or more points in their lives, and as a result, now find their souls anchored to this existence. *Spirits* are those ghosts who did not use pigment; thus spirits constitute the bulk of the after-

CHANGING LAMENTS

It is possible for a character to change his Lament in the course of play. If such a thing happens, it should be a monumental event in the character's existence. The following are examples of the more likely causes of a Lament change.

- A skimmer may become a sleeper as a result of a serious life-threatening injury or illness requiring him to be cryogenically frozen.
- A sleeper may, if the Storyteller agrees, gradually learn to become a skimmer. While changing Laments from skimmer to sleeper is a simple matter of undergoing the cryo-sleep method to project, changing the other way is far more difficult. Your character must train at liberating his spirit at will, while you spend a total of 20 Willpower points in that period. When that training period is complete, you must spend six experience points to fulfill the transition.
- A projector might become a ghost via the simple act of dying. Those who used pigment for soul projection or who overdosed on the drug in some manner become hues. Otherwise, dead characters become spirits.
- Ghosts cannot change Laments. When you're dead, you're dead, and there's not much you can do about it. Sorry.

life population. Their ties to the living are the result of personal issues and passions.

Each Lament has its own benefits as well as drawbacks. Make a note of these after selecting your character's Lament. Laments are fully detailed on pp. 94-98.

NATURE & DEMEANOR (ARCHETYPES)

Next choose your character's Nature, a personality archetype that best suits her true disposition. This self-perception guides how your character interacts with the world. Obviously, people are too complex to be described in a couple of words, but you can establish some basic behaviors for your character through these archetypes.

In addition to providing a rough behavioral guideline, your Nature also gives your character certain benefits. A character's Nature is a reflection of his soul, and as such plays a significant role among the dead (as well as among those living projectors who mimic them). Each Nature archetype grants a bonus to a character's Vitality, Willpower and Spite ratings. A character also possesses certain unique abilities usable only in conjunction with another character of the same Nature grouping (dictated by the person's Shade; see p. 81).

Whereas Nature represents the character's true personality, Demeanor is a mask the character wears when dealing with others. Your character does not have to choose a Demeanor. There may be circumstances forcing a character to adopt a false persona for an extended period of time, however.

A character's Demeanor has no impact on his Vitality, Willpower or Spite ratings, nor can a character use his Demeanor to perform any Nature-based abilities.

Ghosts do not possess Demeanors. As creatures of pure emotion and passion, they wear their hearts on their sleeves, so to speak. Likewise, projectors cannot make use of their Demeanor while outside their bodies. As with ghosts, their souls — and with them, their true selves — are laid bare for all to see.

A list of available Natures and their bonuses, as well as the Default Abilities based on Nature, are detailed below, starting on p. 147 of this chapter.

STEP TWO: SELECT ATTRIBUTES

Once you've defined your concept and selected your role, Shade, Lament, Nature and Demeanor, it's time to assign numbers. The first step is assigning scores to each Attribute. The Attributes define your character's innate capabilities and aptitudes. How fast can your character move? Is she attractive or even beautiful? How sharp are her senses? The Attributes objectively answer each of these questions.

First, prioritize your three Attribute categories: Physical, Social and Mental. Decide which category your character is best at (primary), which category is above average (secondary) and which category is merely average (tertiary). Is she more cerebral than physical, more perceptive and intelligent than strong and tough? If using roles as a guideline, please refer to role's list of suggested Attribute and Ability (starting on p. 136).

- Physical Attributes define your character's physical limits: How fast he runs, his lifting capacity and his overall health. If your character is primarily action-oriented, then you'd be well advised to make Physical your primary category.
- Social Attributes define your character's ability to interact with, relate to and sometimes use others. Social Attributes affect first impressions, your character's ability to inspire or lead people and her attractiveness. If your character is a charmer or very good at deception, Social Attributes make a good choice for your primary category.

ABOVE AVERAGE

When assigning dots to Attributes, remember that a rating of two (2) in any of these Traits is considered average for any normal, everyday person. While it's natural to look upon your lowest ranked Attributes as your character's weak spot, remember that your character's tertiary Attribute category is the one in which she's merely ordinary, while her primary Attribute category is where she truly excels above most others. Simply possessing a rating of three (3) in an Attribute puts a character ahead of the curve, while a rating of four or five makes her one of the smartest, strongest or most likeable people around.

Likewise, a rating of two in any Ability enables that character to use that Talent, Skill or Knowledge in a professional capacity. Athletics 2 justifies a character's presence in a minor league baseball team, while Medicine 2 is appropriate for an EMT or medical student. A character with a rating of three is very good at what she does, while a character with a rating of four or five is among the best around.

Please note that Storytellers should not take this to mean that players should be shackled with some sort of Attribute rating limit to enforce mediocrity upon their characters. Instead it is meant to indicate that the players' characters are special; they stand out from the crowd. Orpheus (as well as their competitors) endeavors to hire the best people they can find. That means it's perfectly acceptable for a character to be a highly skilled computer engineer, car thief or ballet dancer as well as a projector or ghost.

• Mental Attributes define your character's mental capacity. Is she a quick thinker? How sharp is her eyesight? Is she smart? If your character likes puzzles or is an investigator, then Mental Attributes should be primary.

Your character concept and role should give you direction on how to prioritize your Attributes, but don't feel pigeonholed into such choices. Yes, it's perfectly viable to play an athlete with Social Attributes as your primary choice (an ex-football player with a knack for selling himself to the public), or a religious person with Physical Attributes as her primary slot (a nun teaching self-defense classes to young women in the inner city). As noted previously, you can still modify your basic concept, and Attribute priorities might prompt you to alter your focus or intent.

Your character begins with each Attribute at one dot. Priority selection determines how many additional dots you may place in each category: Divide six (6) dots among your character's primary Attributes, four (4) dots among her secondary Attributes and three (3) dots among her tertiary Attributes. You may apply six dots to your Mental Attributes, four to your Social Attributes and three to your Physical Attributes, for example. Each role includes recommendations on how to prioritize your Attributes. You are also not limited in how many dots you may assign to any one Attribute (in the above case, you could apply all three dots in your Physical category to Dexterity, leaving you with Strength and Stamina at one dot and Dexterity at four). You may not raise an Attribute above five dots, however.

Freebie Points allow you to increase an Attribute or two if you feel it necessary.

STEP THREE: SELECT ABILITIES

Abilities describe what your character knows and can do, what he's learned as opposed to what comes from natural potential.

Like Attributes, Abilities rate from one to five dots. This rating represents your competence in that area. You use this number (usually added to an Attribute) to determine how many dice you roll when your character uses an Ability. Unlike Attributes, Abilities begin with a zero rating.

Abilities also fall into three categories: Talents, Skills and Knowledges.

- Talents are intuitive Abilities inherent or learned "in the field."
- Skills are Abilities learned through rigorous training or determination. Characters may learn them with careful practice, but can also study or learn them through training.

• Knowledges are "book learning" and the result of years worth of higher education. They are typically mental pursuits or studies learned through schooling or books.

Players should prioritize Abilities during character creation. Divide eleven (11) dots among your character's primary Abilities, seven (7) dots among her secondary Abilities and four (4) dots among her tertiary Abilities. Each role includes recommendations for Ability prioritization, as well as for possible selections in each Ability category.

Starting characters may have no Ability above a rating of three (3) at this point. You may raise Abilities to four or five by spending Freebie Points, however.

STEP FOUR: RECORD ADVANTAGES

Advantages are a collection of traits measuring your character's ability to influence the world around him. Advantages are neither prioritized nor ranked. Instead, each Advantage has a specific number of dots or slots allotted. It is possible to increase them with freebie points if you so desire.

HORRORS

Each Shade automatically possesses one of several instinctive supernatural powers known as Horrors. You may also spend freebie points to purchase the more advanced Horror abilities available to your Shade, as well as the Horrors available to other Shades.

Certain Horrors are incompatible with the worldviews and motivations at the heart of specific Shades, however. Because of this, each Shade has a specific set of Horrors they cannot learn. The Character Creation Summary on p. 122 lists which Horrors are forbidden to which Shade.

STAINS

Stains are physical manifestations of a character's inner rage and hatred. They often represent what the character hates or loathes in himself and often manifest under specific situations (like when someone's Spite rating exceeds her starting Vitality). Each of these physical defects brings with it a unique set of advantages and disadvantages. Select three (3) Stains for your character. When selecting these Stains, remember that each choice should be a deep personal reflection of your character's psyche.

Unlike most other Traits, players may not purchase Stains with freebie points. Instead, players may opt to take up two (2) additional Stains, gaining one (1) additional freebie point for each.

Characters may also willingly use Stains (at a cost), but only if their Spite rating is four or greater.

BACHGROUNDS

Backgrounds are a measure of who your character knows, who knows him and what resources he can draw upon. There are two types of Background traits in Orpheus. The first is Mundane Backgrounds. These represent the sort of Traits to which any character could have access. The second is Orpheus Backgrounds, representing those traits available to Orpheus agents via their employer (though Storytellers may rule that another organization — Terrel & Squib for example — is certainly capable of offering characters "similar benefits"). Characters receive two (2) dots to spend on Mundane Backgrounds and two (2) dots to spend on Orpheus Backgrounds. Such Backgrounds should tie into your character concept and role as defined in Step One. You may raise Backgrounds by spending freebie points.

Note that ghosts (hues and spirits) cannot take Detective License or Personal Trainer. Ghosts may not take Arsenal, Health Insurance or Resources *unless* it is as a commodity they acquired in life that is now available to the crucible. Such a background is non-replenishing, and can never be raised. If the crucible uses such a Background, it will be depleted. Arsenal and Resources will gradually run dry. Health Insurance can be cashed in for a one-time cash benefit only. Projectors, meanwhile, cannot take Memorial or Reincarnate, two Backgrounds specific to ghosts because of their very existence.

STEP FIVE: FINISHING TOUCHES

Now it's time to determine your character's final traits and finish rounding him out.

VITALITY

Vitality is a measure of your character's spiritual energy. It is, quite literally, his life force; the higher your character's Vitality, the stronger his connection to the world of the living. Your character's Shade and Nature determine his starting Vitality. Each Shade includes a Base Vitality score, and each Nature includes a modifier to that score. The sum of your character's Base Vitality and his Vitality modifier represents his starting Vitality trait. You may increase your character's starting Vitality by spending freebie points, but you cannot exceed a starting Vitality of nine. Hues cannot exceed a starting Vitality of seven.

It is highly recommended that your character's starting Vitality be much higher than his beginning Spite rating. Once a character's Spite rating matches or exceeds his Vitality, he becomes more and more twisted by the malevolent emotions within and runs the risk of eventually being consumed by his own hatred.

You can find full details on Vitality and its uses on p. 188 of this chapter.

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Living characters possess an additional trait that the dead do not. Health levels allow you to keep track of your character's current *physical* condition, including how much damage she took from, say, being hit with a baseball bat. It also lists the penalty imposed on your character's dice pool for each level of physical injury sustained. The dead (spirits, hues and projecting sleepers) do not possess health levels. Instead, they use Vitality to measure their *spiritual* condition.

Full details on health levels and the results of physical injury may be found in Chapter Four: Working the System.

WILLPOWER

Willpower describes the extent of your character's self-control and her determination in surmounting adverse circumstances. As with Vitality, your character's starting Willpower consists of adding the Willpower modifier of his Nature to the Base Willpower score of his Shade. You may increase your character's starting Willpower by spending freebie points.

Full details on Willpower and its uses may be found on p. 199 of this chapter.

SPITE

Spite is a measure of your character's inner rage, emotional turmoil and self-loathing. As with Vitality and Willpower, your character's starting Spite rating results from adding his Nature's Spite modifier to his Shade's Base Spite score. Spite may not increase through freebie points.

If a character's Spite rating exceeds his beginning Vitality, he suffers penalties in both social interaction and in controlling his Horrors. Full details on Spite and its dangers may be found starting on p. 192 of this chapter.

FREEBIE POINTS

You have a total of 15 freebie points to round out your character and increase your Traits. You may spend these points however you wish. Each dot has a variable freebie point cost based on the type of Trait. See the table in the Character Creation Summary on p. 122 for the freebie point cost of each Trait. You may spend freebie points at any time during character creation.

THE SPARK OF DEATH

Now it's time to work out some of those character qualities that have nothing to do with game mechanics. It's not absolutely necessary to write these down, but it is highly recommended. At the very least, consider each

of them after character creation and during the games that follow. Some will change over time while others may become cemented. These are the things that truly make your character come alive (so to speak), rather than be just a collection of dots on a character sheet.

APPEARANCE

What does your character look like? How do her Traits affect that? If she has four dots in Strength, those muscles will show. If she has a high Charisma, that translates to how she moves and talks. Go over her concept and Traits and see how you can use those as descriptive hooks. Your choices will not only reflect your character's appearance, but also how she dresses, how she acts and how she speaks. Does she move with confidence and have a steady gaze, or does she hunch over and refuse to look anyone in the eye? Does she prefer casual, rugged clothing or does she have more expensive and refined tastes? Just remember that it's more evocative to say, "the car accident that almost killed my character crushed her face" than to say, "My character has one dot of Appearance."

QUIRHS

Everyone has unique habits, anecdotes, interests and hobbies that do not define the core concept, but do offer that character more color or depth... a more realistic feel. Write a few sentences on the back of your character sheet describing some of these quirks — they might range from her refusal to drink American beer to wearing a favored pair of snakeskin boots or habitually whistling old show tunes. You can always add more quirks after play begins, if new possibilities occur to you.

MOTIVATIONS

What drives your character? Why does she continue working with Orpheus and its operations or risk her life on dangerous missions on a semi-regular basis? While it may seem that helping lost souls is worthy for its own sake, surely most characters have other reasons for what they do? What in your character's history or concept pushes her to risk her life or soul? A compelling, dramatic reason can give you much mileage for roleplaying in any chronicle. Perhaps your character is a thrill-junkie looking for the excitement he never found as an accountant before dying of a long, tortured battle with cancer. Religious convictions, personal vendettas, scientific curiosity, remorse for previous sins and any of a dozen other motivations are all possible. Your character's motivation is, ultimately, the answer to the question, "Why does she do this?"

SOCIAL TIES

Characters don't live in a vacuum (not even ghosts). Think about the people in your character's life (or death). Are her parents still alive? Does she have a spouse? A lover? Children? What about friends, neighbors and co-workers? Does she own pets? How have these relationships changed now that she's an Orpheus agent? Do her husband and children know what she does now? If she's dead, does anyone remember her? In what sort of world does your character exist?

THEPRELUDE

A person's past is the foundation upon which her personality is built. For that reason, you should have some idea of your character's life before she became a ghost or projector, to better understand her. The prelude is something of a one-on-one mini-story; just you and the Storyteller, roleplaying events from your character's life before the actual start of the chronicle. The prelude provides context for the character's past and her experience with death, her reaction to it and what she does afterwards. This serves as a storytelling device to help detail her mortal existence and personality up until the moments before the first story begins.

You roleplay a prelude much as you would a normal game session, except that you compress years of life into an evening of rapid-fire decisions. Romantic relationships, school, work, family, outside threats... these are all things you might need to address, for better or worse, over the prelude's course. Upon completing the prelude, you should understand your character's personal history in detail, and you may find that some elements of her past actually foreshadow her existence as a ghost or projector.

A prelude offers a frame of reference for everything else happening to your character, and how she reacts to such events during the chronicle. Without it, a character wouldn't be as complete. The prelude is fairly quick and dirty, just like the brief exposition of personal background that a film gives for a major character. It's essential to understanding the character, but it doesn't require half an hour of the film.

STORYTELLING THE PRELUDE

The Storyteller should take the time to run one-on-one preludes for each player, unless two characters were close friends or grew up together before the chronicle begins. It's important to keep the player focused during the prelude — it should be a very personal experience, giving each character a sense of history. Some players may want to share a prelude, for example, if their characters were longtime friends (perhaps from child-hood). Otherwise, it's best to run preludes one person at a time. Don't worry about the other players; they can spend time socializing, refining their characters, discussing their plans for the chronicle or calling out for pizza. The prelude is too important to neglect, but the Storyteller should tell the players what to expect

for the evening so they might entertain themselves while awaiting their turn.

When running the prelude, don't take too much time with each vignette. Lay out the scene, give the player a chance to make a few decisions, then move on to the next person. You can use this opportunity to foreshadow some of the chronicle's events (perhaps a recurring enemy appears in each prelude?), but don't dwell on any one thing for too long. Your goal is to make the player respond instinctively to each situation, rather than with deliberation. This gives a very concentrated sense of what the character's life is like.

The prelude serves as an opportunity for players to explore the rules and setting. Give her room to do so, but try avoiding combat. If combat does occur, simply describe the outcome (you don't want to accidentally kill the character before the game starts).

The player may change her mind about some of her character's Traits as a result of decisions and actions during the prelude, and it's fine to let her change things around to better fit her concept. Don't allow players to simply juggle Traits to make invincible characters. The idea is to highlight the character's nuances, not engage in a number-crunching exercise. Use the prelude to explore the character's Traits. Does he have a Detective's License? Cover how he earned it. Allies? Run a few vignettes showing how she met her friends.

It's important when running preludes to establish some normalcy... the routine. This gives you a sense of the mundane that you can gleefully shatter when the strangeness and horror of death occurs. It's a great way to build dramatic tension both before and during the actual shift.

The prelude is presented as a storytelling session, but it's important to allow the player to interrupt and offer input. After all, this is her character, and she should not have to deal with elements she finds intolerable. It's also important that she's a part of the process.

Finally, take the time to give the shift between life and death all the detail it needs. Play it up as much as you can, focus on the intensity of the moment when the character finds herself outside her physical body. Stress the horrific; ghosts and projectors lead an existence defying many of the comfortable assumptions held by mundane society. Use it to give the change impact and weight. Make it clear that the character has irrevocably crossed a line and her existence will never again be the same.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

When playing through your prelude, you should keep the following questions in mind. These questions are a springboard to fill out the character's history as much as possible. You should answer all of them to some extent by the time you're done (and you should have an idea as how to answer some of them before beginning). It often helps to write out the answers (whether or not you've played through the prelude). Even if there isn't time for a detailed prelude, you should try responding to as many of these questions as possible (write them out if you like, or discuss them with your Storyteller). If written beforehand, it can guide the Storyteller. If afterward, it can still be an invaluable means of solidifying concepts in your mind.

Each question lists some things you should ask yourself while fleshing out your character. The questions also include some advice on how to use these elements in the prelude. The more you know about your character, the more real she'll seem when the game begins.

• How old are you?

When were you born? How long has it been since you died (or became a projector)? How old do you look? Are you more mature than you seem? Less?

• What was your family life like?

Were you raised by both parents? Did one — or both — of them die? Do you have brothers or sisters? Are you married? Divorced? More than once? Do you have any children? Is anyone else in your family a ghost?

Where are you from?

Where were you born? Where did you grow up? How did your native culture shape your beliefs about death, ghosts and the afterlife?

• What do you believe?

In what religious tradition were you raised? What religious tradition do you follow now? How has your exposure to the afterlife influenced your faith and belief systems? How does your faith influence your views of the afterlife?

• What did you do?

What was your job? What were your hobbies? Was your job (or leisure pursuits) dangerous? How did you feel about that danger? Was it an acceptable risk given the potential payoff? Was the danger what drew you to the job or hobby in the first place?

• How do you solve problems?

How do you deal with the obstacles life puts in your path? Brute force? Trickery? Negotiation? Avoidance? How do your problem-solving methods reflect on your Shade?

• When did you first experience death?

Where did it happen? Was it accidental or self-inflicted? Did you find the experience terrifying? Exhilarating? Both? What kept you from dying that first time? Did someone save your life or did you overcome death yourself?

• How did death change you?

Did your near death experiences (or your final death) cause any changes in your habits or behavior? Did you quit your job? Drop out of school? Become obsessed with



squeezing as much from life as you could while there was still time?

• Are you still alive?

Are you a projector who has one foot among the world and the other among the dead? Or are you a ghost who intrudes upon the living? How do you feel about your current existence? Do you wish you could live again? That you could forget what you know about the other side? That you could die completely?

• When did you first encounter ghosts?

Did you believe in ghosts before becoming one? Was this belief based on personal experience? Were these encounters friendly? Hostile? Mysterious? Horrifying?

Have you ever used pigment?

Do you have any exposure to the latest trend in designer drugs, or the subculture that accompanies it? Do you know anyone who does? Do you know anyone who has died from using it? Did you die from using it?

• How did you first hear about Orpheus?

Did you know about Orpheus before becoming a ghost or projector? What brought them to your attention? What brought you to theirs? Did they teach you how to become a projector? Did they rescue you from an existence as a mindless drone? Help you resolve the personal issues that led to you becoming a spirit?

What do you think about Orpheus?

Do you believe in what Orpheus does? Do you trust the people you work for? The people you work with? How loyal are you to Orpheus?

• What do you think about Orpheus' rivals?

What do you think about those groups competing with Orpheus for contracts and resources? Have you even heard of these groups? Did any of them try recruiting you? Are you a double agent working for one of these groups?

• Do you have any connections outside of Orpheus?

Do you maintain contact with your family and friends? Do they know what you do or is that a secret? How well do you trust them?

• What is your greatest love?

What do you love more than anything? What would you be willing to sacrifice for that "cause?" A romantic interest? A family member? Yourself? Your faith? Knowledge? Power? Personal gain? Would you sacrifice yourself for your love? Would you sacrifice someone else?

• What is your greatest regret?

What haunts you? Is there a death you feel you could have prevented? Did you betray someone in their time of greatest need? Did you fail at something important? Is there an opportunity you missed? Does this regret appear in your Stains?

• What is your greatest hate?

Who or what do you hate the most? Why do you hate this thing or person? Did this person betray you or harm someone you love? Does a certain action or philosophy go against every virtue you hold dear? Is your hatred directed against a certain gender, race, religion, orientation or culture? Is your hatred directed against yourself or someone you love?

• What is your greatest fear?

What terrifies you? Are you afraid of spiders or heights? Of a loved one's death? Of failure or rejection? What causes this fear? Is there a personal trauma still haunting you? Is it related to one of your near-death experiences?

Who would play you?

If your chronicle became a movie, who would play your character and why? What mannerisms (if any) from previous roles would they bring to your character?

THE CRUCIBLE

The work performed by Orpheus agents is difficult and, at times, dangerous. Luckily, agents don't work alone. They have partners to rely on for aid and support. Based upon the results of employee screening and psychological exams, Orpheus places its agents into field teams known as crucibles. Orpheus expects team members to both complement each other's skills and abilities and to work together effectively.

As an extension of their research into the nature of ghosts and projectors, Orpheus developed a method enabling spooks to share spiritual energy (Vitality) with one another. A side effect of this process is that the crucible members develop strong emotional and psychological bonds. The end result is a team of paranormal agents who not only work more closely together, but can also pool their energies and coordinate use of their powers.

When a crucible first forms, teammates typically treat it as a simple work arrangement. When tested by fire, the crucible members find themselves forced to trust each other with their very souls. As time passes and the crucible works together more and more, the bond grows stronger, possibly even exceeding one's ties to friends, family members and other loved ones.

CREATING THE CRUCIBLE

The crucible serves as the chronicle's center, the axis around which everything else revolves. Characters can join or die (or even die then join), but the crucible remains. Because of its nature, it's extremely important that players agree on the sort of crucible they want to play, since that will directly affect the kinds of stories they encounter. If a player decides she doesn't like her character two stories into a chronicle, it's easy enough to let her switch into a new one. If the players decide

they don't like the crucible's nature, it may be necessary to overhaul the chronicle completely.

For a crucible to work, the characters must cooperate with each other. This is not to say that all the characters must like each other unconditionally and get along in all things; this is impossible. In fact, it's more interesting if the characters disagree over some matters and experience conflict... every family has its problems. Beyond all that, though, is the fact that a crucible is more than the sum of its members. It describes those individuals as a group with common goals, motivations, enemies and background.

It may help if players visualize the crucible as a character unto itself and work out its nature before they even begin to create their characters. The Storyteller and players should discuss the group's purpose for existence (all crucibles have one, even if it's a simple as survival) and how it was formed. What must it accomplish? How does it interact with others? Once the players decide upon a crucible concept, they can decide who fills which roles within the crucible and what kind of characters they want to include.

CRUCIBLE QUESTIONS

When creating the crucible, players should answer several questions before building their characters or playing out their preludes, but they may change specifics afterward. The important thing is to establish a firm group concept to give each character context.

• What is the crucible's mission?

What does Orpheus expect of the group, and what sorts of assignments are typical? Are they part of a public relations team handling the high profile, media friendly missions and making public appearances? Are they investigators researching hauntings and other paranormal phenomenon? Recovery specialists helping lost souls? Do they perform psychological warfare operations (i.e., hauntings for hire)? Intrusion specialists who recover objects and information (i.e., thieves and industrial spies)? Troubleshooters who arrange untraceable "accidents?"

• Where is the crucible based?

Where is the crucible's home base? Orpheus's prime research lab? One of their branch offices? A mobile field unit?

• Who is the crucible's controller?

Who is the group's immediate supervisor? Is she their primary contact with Orpheus? Does the crucible know who acts as their supervisor's superior? Can they contact him if necessary?

• Who, if anyone, is the crucible's leader?

Who within the crucible serves as leader? How did the crucible decide upon a leader? Was the decision unanimous? Official? Does anyone in the group contest this choice?

• How do the crucible members feel about each other?

What is each member's opinion about the others? How does he believe the other members feel about him? How well do the members trust each other? Have any of the members developed friendships? Personal relationships? Rivalries?

• Who are the crucible's friends and allies?

Who else does the group trust? Who outside the group do members rely on to help them when needed? Does the group have any allies outside Orpheus?

• Who are the crucible's rivals or enemies?

Does the group have any rivals? Why are they rivals? Does the crucible have any enemies? Who are they and why do they hate the crucible? What are their motivations? Are these rivals or enemies members of Orpheus? Or are they enemies of Orpheus itself?

EXAMPLE OF CHARACTER CREATION

Malcolm is making a character for Gwen's new Orpheus chronicle. Before doing anything else, Gwen and her players discuss the game's intended setting, theme and mood. Gwen plans a campaign focusing on Orpheus' investigations of the underground pigment network. The players decide their characters will all have some previous experience with one or more of the subcultures involved in the network.

STEP ONE: CONCEPT

First, Malcolm needs a concept around which to build his character. Malcolm decides his character is an ex-vice cop now working for Orpheus. Malcolm names his character Jacob Miller and decides that the department forced Jacob into early retirement after he burned out on the job. His character needs some previous brushes with death, so Malcolm settles on Jacob's first near-death experience as the result of being shot in the line of duty. Malcolm decides this will not be Jacob's only brush with death, but he'll settle on specifics later.

Next, Malcolm selects a role for his concept. Clearly, Police Officer is the most fitting.

Malcolm then selects a Shade. Looking over the list of Shades, Malcolm decides on Banshee. Because Banshees typically possess a keen insight, Malcolm decides that Jacob is a natural judge of character who grasps the motivations and trustworthiness of the people with whom he deals.

Once he chooses his Shade, Malcolm decides on a Lament. Malcolm wants Jacob to remain among the living, and to be able to deal with the quick and the dead as needed. With that in mind, he makes Jacob a skimmer. Finally, Malcolm chooses Jacob's Nature. Malcolm picks Mediator, one of the more common archetypes for Banshee, deciding that it helps reflect Jacob's motivations for becoming a cop (to help people peacefully) and for joining Orpheus.

STEP TWO: ATTRIBUTES

Now that Malcolm has a concept, he needs to assign dots to determine Jacob's abilities. The Police Officer role places Physical Attributes as primary, with Mental Attributes as secondary and Social as tertiary. Malcolm decides this is suitable for Jacob's concept.

Malcolm takes the six points for primary Attributes and spreads them evenly, placing two dots each in Strength, Dexterity and Stamina. Jacob is in excellent physical shape, but does not excel in any area. Jacob's Physical Attributes are Strength 3, Dexterity 3 and Stamina 3.

For Mental Attributes, Malcolm assigns two dots to Perception, reflecting Jacob's keen insight. For the remaining two dots, Malcolm places one in Intelligence and one in Wits. Jacob is average in both areas. Jacob's Mental Attributes are Perception 3, Intelligence 2 and Wits 2.

Finally, Malcolm spreads his three dots for tertiary Attributes evenly across Charisma, Manipulation and Appearance. Jacob is perfectly able to deal with others, but does not excel at it. Jacob's Social Attributes are Charisma 2, Manipulation 2 and Appearance 2.

STEP THREE: ABILITIES

Malcolm now turns his attention to Abilities. Malcolm makes a note of his role's ability prioritization. The Police Officer role places Knowledges as primary, Skills as secondary and Talents as tertiary. This prioritization makes it impossible for Malcolm to take several abilities he feels are necessary for his character concept, however. With Gwen's approval, Malcolm makes Talents his primary ability category, and assigns Knowledges as secondary and Skills as tertiary.

With eleven dots to spend on Talents, Malcolm assigns two to Streetwise, reflecting Jacob's familiarity with the streets from his time as a vice cop, and another two dots to Intuition, to reflect Jacob's insightfulness. Malcolm then places three dots into Athletics, deciding it fits well with Jacob's high Physical Attributes. Next, Malcolm assigns two dots to Alertness and one dot each to Intimidation and Subterfuge, representing the abilities Jacob honed in the line of duty.

Malcolm now has seven dots to spend on Knowledges. Malcolm assigns three dots to Investigation, representing Jacob's abilities as a detective. Malcolm next places one dot in Law. Jacob is familiar with the law as it applies to his former job, but is no expert. Malcolm also assigns a dot to Linguistics, deciding Jacob learned high school

Spanish and practiced it while working on the streets. Finally, Malcolm assigns one dot each to Bureaucracy and Computers, representing his familiarity with the bureaucratic red tape of modern police work.

This leaves four dots to spend on Skills. Malcolm assigns one dot each to Drive, Firearms and Security to reflect his basic police training. Although the single dot in Firearms may seem low, Malcolm decides that Jacob, like the vast majority of police detectives, has rarely fired his gun in the line of duty. With a single dot left, Malcolm places that in Meditation to reflect the basic instruction Orpheus gave Jacob while training him as a skimmer.

STEP FOUR: ADVANTAGES

Malcolm now turns his attention to Backgrounds. Because Jacob was a cop, Malcolm places his two Orpheus Background dots in Detective License. Malcolm then places one dot in Resources to represent Jacob's rather small pension (the perk of forced retirement). For his final dot, Malcolm gives Jacob a level of Contacts to reflect his friendly associates in the police department and on the streets.

Next, Malcolm notes Jacob's Horror. Because Jacob is a Banshee, he automatically receives Wail.

Finally, Malcolm selects Jacob's three Stains: Claws, Gossamer Webs and Martyred.

STEP FIVE: FINISHING TOUCHES

Malcolm calculates Jacob's starting Vitality, Willpower and Spite ratings.

Because Jacob is a Banshee, his Base Vitality rating is 5. Malcolm adds to this the Vitality modifier from his Nature. As a Mediator, Jacob receives an additional two points to his Vitality rating. This gives Jacob a decent starting Vitality rating of 7.

Malcolm then follows the same formula to determine his Willpower. Banshees begin with a Willpower rating of three. Jacob's Mediator Nature allows him to raise that by one point, for a starting Willpower rating of four.

Finally, Malcolm calculates his Spite. As a Banshee, Jacob has a Base Spite rating of zero. Because the Mediator Nature adds two to the character's Spite rating, Malcolm's character begins play with a Spite rating of two!

Malcolm hasn't spent any freebie points during character creation, so he now has 15 points to spend in any way he sees fit. Malcolm begins by spending five points to raise Jacob's Wits to 3 dots, to reflect the sort of quick thinking he needs on the streets. Malcolm then spends two points to raise Jacob's Instinct Ability from 2 to 3 dots. Finally, he spends one point to raise his Detective License to three, and the remaining seven points to purchase Forebode, his other Shade Horror.

All that remains now for Malcolm is Jacob's description, history and quirks. Malcolm decides that Jacob is in his mid-30s, average height and thin, but well-muscled owing to his efforts at keeping in decent physical shape. Jacob wears his blonde hair short, but grew a full beard since leaving the department. He hasn't shaved it since. Although he carries himself with a high degree of personal confidence, Jacob also appears somewhat world weary and his eyes are those of a man who's been heavily battered by life. When not on assignment, Jacob favors well-worn slacks or jeans, "wife-beater" undershirts and a selection from his impressively large collection of bowling shirts.

Malcolm has already decided on some of the basics of Jacob's history. Now he needs to flesh it out a little. Malcolm decides that Jacob became a cop from a sense of idealism and a desire to protect people. He was an honest cop and managed to steer clear of his profession's more corrupt elements. Jacob's first near-death experience came early in his career when he was shot in the line of duty. Despite his being critically wounded and flatlining, EMTs revived him. Jacob soon returned to work and eventually earned a position on the vice squad. Over the next ten years, Jacob distinguished himself as a model detective.

A year ago, Jacob's partner of five years died in the line of duty, which hurt Jacob immensely. He started drinking, and his work suffered noticeably. Finally, the department forced Jacob out of his job. Because of his service record, he received early retirement rather than being dismissed from the force. This only worsened the downward spiral, sending Jacob into a pit of despair and alcoholism. One night, Jacob tried drinking himself to death, only to find himself outside his body. Although it only lasted a few minutes, the terror of the experience, which closely mirrored his memories of being shot, were enough to shock him out of his depression and turn his life around. Jacob spent the next several months working as a private security specialist, hiring himself out as a bodyguard and PI, while spending his spare time trying to figure out what happened to him during his near-death experience. A newspaper article led Jacob to the Orpheus Group. After an initial interview, they offered him a job. He accepted and shortly thereafter learned to become a skimmer.

Malcolm decides that Jacob is somewhat standoffish from the rest of his crucible. After losing his longtime partner, he is wary of forming close relationships with co-workers. In spite of several casual associations over the years, Jacob has no significant personal connections; he's always more devoted to the job than anything else.

ROLES

The characters in this game have all survived several near-death experiences. They are people with an exceptional reserve of inner strength and will to live (or at least, exist). Every one of these characters is above average in some way. Normal people don't touch death so often and return as they have without some consequence.

This core book offers 20 roles from which the player may choose his character's profession or lifestyle. Players should select the career choice with the greatest impact on their character's life. So, for example, if a player wanted to play a reformed gang member who spent time in prison, he could choose either the Reformed Criminal or the Gang Member role to start with, depending on which lifestyle influenced him most. Some characters may have multiple roles from which to select.

Roles define which Attributes and Abilities are Primary, Secondary and Tertiary. Also, each lists Traits that fit the role. For example, it's unlikely a Police Officer would have no skill in Firearms. Such an individual would have never finished the academy. Roles are meant as guidelines to simplify the game, but they should not be ironclad. Abilities can change for different individuals, but the listed suggestions should form a baseline. Obviously, players and Storytellers can agree on whatever makes sense for their game.

The descriptions of each role are guidelines, and players should flesh those out to fit their concepts. Many of the descriptions give character motivations and establish subplots for the chronicles. Again, both players and Storytellers should look at any chosen role and pick and choose what parts they like and what they don't.

For players lacking a strong concept, the descriptions offer a good start, though some require that a player elaborate more about the character's history. For example, in the Reformed Criminal role, the description never mentions the crime committed. That detail is up to the player. Again, a player should take them as a launching point for her imagination. If a player never made a character before or is stuck for a background, simply use the description as it stands and fill in the details with the Storyteller as the chronicle progresses.

Some roles need the consent and assistance of the Storyteller. Jane Doe, another example, implies the Storyteller should help with the background. If a Storyteller doesn't want to play with the subplots within a role, then she should change them. In addition, if the Storyteller is uncomfortable with certain roles, he should inform the players and remain sensitive. If a player suffered abuse, he may be uncomfortable with anyone choosing the Abuse Survivor.

In addition to the 20 basic roles listed on the following pages, each role has several variations. For high action chronicles, Storytellers may consider allowing players to take these more effective variants, but the decision to play them should be uniform (as in everyone chooses from a medium or high-level variant) since each level is more powerful than the one below it or than the baseline. To facilitate this decision, the basic role provides for standard character generation, while the medium and high variants increase the baseline character with bonuses to Abilities and Attributes. Also, since 20 can hardly encompass the full range of player tastes, Storytellers should use these as starting points and to create their own roles.

Here are guidelines on building new roles. Attributes and Abilities should stick to the basics, 6/4/3 and 11/7/4 respectively. For Medium variations, the Storyteller should treat the role as having the equivalent of 15 extra freebie points above that already listed in character creation. At least one dot should go toward Attributes. For High variations, Storytellers should award the equivalent of +30 freebie points, giving at least two dots toward Attributes. In some cases, adding Willpower, Backgrounds and Vitality is appropriate. Storytellers should avoid Horrors (healthy advice for all of us) or limit players to purchasing one additional one at most. In the case of the 20 roles listed herein, those +15 and +30 freebie points have already been filled in as recommendations.

ROLE: ABUSE SURVIVOR

Description: One day at a time, that's how you survived. You kept wishing that everything would change. You kept thinking the same things every morning. Maybe you'd be perfect in his eyes, just for today. Maybe you'd do everything right and the yelling and pushing and the private abuses would stop. Maybe you wouldn't have to lie to friends or teachers. Maybe you wouldn't have to lie to the doctors in the ER.

Finally, you stopped lying to yourself.

You escaped. You never realized how much pain and suffering had become part of your life, until it ended. You nearly died numerous times, but now... no more bruises and no more broken bones. You healed, until finally, even the fear went away.

You grew strong. You weren't about to become a victim again. You dedicated your life to waging a personal war against abuse. You wanted to join the FBI, but they didn't want you. They had concerns about your mental state. The local police rejected you as well. They believed you couldn't handle the stress. You joined a local charity and raised money for shelters, but it wasn't enough. You weren't satisfied. You wanted to bring the abusers to justice. You wanted to work in law enforcement.

Finally, you joined Orpheus, and they treated you with respect. The recruiter told you your experiences gave you strength and insight, qualities that Orpheus sought in its employees. Orpheus gave you a chance, and you've set out to make sure it's the best decision they ever made.

Attributes: (6/4/3) Mental/Social/Physical Abilities: (11/7/4) Talents/Knowledges/Skills Talents: Athletics, Brawl, Leadership, Subterfuge

Skills: Drive, Performance, Stealth **Knowledges:** Finance, Law, Medicine

Variations

Medium — Vengeful Rape Victim (Add +2 to Attributes, +1 to Abilities and +1 to Willpower)

High — Escaped POW (Add +3 to Attributes, +3 to Abilities and +3 to Willpower)

ROLE: BICYCLE MESSENGER

Description: You lived on the edge, darting between cars and people as you sped through the city. When time was essential, you delivered. The thrill was taking chances - weaving in and out of traffic, using short cuts through alleys, dodging people on the sidewalks. Riding dangerously gave you focus. You loved the rush, and life was so much better than the dread nine to five corporate existence of the zombies who paid you. You would have killed yourself if someone forced you into a cubicle.

Unfortunately, the need for the thrill pushed you too far. You nearly died on a regular basis while delivering packages. One time you took a short cut through an alley and discovered a large, open grating beneath your wheels. You fell ten feet in a sudden second. When a delivery truck ran a red light and you jumped a green, the collision wasn't pretty. To his credit, the driver had the common sense not to back up and run over you twice. You experienced that with a sedan. Thankfully, in most cases, you healed quickly, but each time, the recovery period grew longer and longer. Even a cubicle starts looking good from a hospital bed.

You did a few deliveries for a group called Orpheus, and became involved in some nice conversations with their receptionist. Looking back on it, the flirting was probably an interview. They offered you a job on your sixth call to them, but you weren't a stranger to job offers. Although you always said no to past offers, this time you said yes. You haven't a clue why you accepted, but a change of pace probably wouldn't hurt you much. Maybe you'll wake up one morning without the stiffness or aches. Orpheus told you the job wouldn't bore you. You'll see, though. If you end up behind a desk, you are out of there.

Attributes: (6/4/3) Physical/Social/Mental

Abilities: (11/7/4) Talents/Skills/Knowledges Talents: Alertness, Athletics, Streetwise

Skills: Drive, Etiquette, Stealth

Knowledges: Any

Variations

Medium — Extreme Athlete (Add +1 to Attributes and +5 to Abilities)

High — Drug Courier (Add +2 to Attributes, +6 to Abilities, +2 to Backgrounds and +2 to Willpower)

ROLE: CAB DRIVER

Description: Life as a hack was never dull. You knew the ins and outs of the city, from the side streets to the sidewalks. You saw the little things that made the city work. You knew the small shops that sold everything and the secret meeting places where the criminals conspired with upstanding businessmen.

It's strange how some people acted in your cab. Sometimes, they carried on conversations about private topics like you weren't even there. Those fares saw you as part of the taxi, an extension of the seat and the engine. Other times, the people in your cab needed to talk. They'd tell you everything, confessing their sins to the priest behind the wheel.

You understood people. You made them feel better. It helped with tips. Later, it became your way to pass the time. You looked at clothing, at how people carried themselves. You listened to voice tones to catch moods. After some punk robbed you, you watched for warning signs.

Some criminals, especially drug users, saw you as an easy mark. They call and someone drives up with a car full of cash. You had your share of close calls, but your life wasn't worth the job. One guy freaked out and dropped his stash in your back seat while holding you up (you kept the designer drug, pigment, but haven't decided whether to try it, sell it or see if the cops arrest you for turning it in).

Your life changed after picking up a group of Orpheus agents in a desperate situation. They were scared out of their wits and wanted you to drive them away from an empty lot fast! It was 3:00 AM, so you drove fast. They were impressed, and somehow, one of them got you talking. They offered you a job and a decent salary, but you've kept your hack license, just in case.

Attributes: (6/4/3) Social/Mental/Physical Abilities: (11/7/4) Talents/Skills/Knowledges

Talents: Alertness, Empathy, Expression, Streetwise, Subterfuge

Skills: Drive, Firearms, Melee

Knowledges: Academics, Linguistics, Politics

Variations

Medium — Getaway Driver, Military Chauffeur (Add +1 to Attributes and +5 to Abilities)

High — Paid Transporter (Add +2 to Attributes, +8 to Abilities and +4 to Backgrounds)

ROLE: CANCER SURVIVOR

Description: You remember the day of your diagnosis with crystal clarity. The antiseptic smell of the room was matched only by the look on the doctor's face. You knew immediately she had bad news... that your cancer was terminal. You stayed strong for the visit, breaking down after you arrived home. You kept thinking: *I'm too young*.

After the third chemotherapy session, you completely lost control. Why fight it if you were just going to die anyway? Who can really beat cancer? After struggling with suicidal thoughts for most of the night, you reached a spiritual plateau and sense of peace. You put your faith in a higher power and decided that you had the strength to face this challenge. You would fight for your life.

You made the best of your time on disability. You fought the sickness every day, feeling weaker from the chemotherapy than the cancer. It was rough. An experimental drug nearly killed you instead of saving you, but you continued fighting. You exercised and you ate the right foods. You searched the Internet for new techniques to fight the disease and sought out alternative medicine while strengthening your own faith. You took time to laugh and develop a rock-hard positive outlook.

For now, you've won. The cancer is in remission. You made it. You feel better than you ever have and radiate an inner strength. Your disability insurance, however, ran out, and few places seemed willing to hire you. No one wanted to face the possible return of your cancer. Deciding to join Orpheus wasn't your intention, but they seem willing to have you. You've felt the touch of death. Now, you'll see the other side, but on your terms.

Attributes: (6/4/3) Mental, Social, Physical Abilities: (11/7/4) Knowledges/Talents/Skills

Talents: Awareness, Empathy, Expression, Intuition

Skills: Meditation, Performance

Knowledges: Bureaucracy, Computer, Enigmas, Law, Medicine, Occult

Variations

Medium — Burn Victim (Add +3 to Abilities and +3 to Willpower)

High — Recovered Coma Patient (Add +2 to Attributes and +10 to Abilities)

ROLE: CASHIER

Description: You weren't even scheduled to work that first time a robbery went bad. You came in on your day off because someone called in sick, but the day was slow, until you found a gun barrel in your face.

He screamed, "Open the safe!" You pointed at the sign reading "Employees cannot open the safe." You told him, "I can't!" He kept screaming. Then the gun went off.

You wonder if he meant to shoot you. You weren't going to protect a few hundred dollars over for minimum wage. Hell, you might have helped him for a cut, but once you recovered, you returned to work. If you'd had qualifications for anything else, you would have left long ago. As it was, you weren't qualified for much and you needed the money. So, you told yourself, you had your one bad experience.

Since then, you've been stabbed, shot again and nearly beaten to death. Your vision hasn't returned completely after the last incident. The guy who savaged you was crazy, no doubt, ramming your head repeatedly into the cash drawer. When the emergency room staff knows your name and where you work, it's a bad thing.

You figure Orpheus has someone hanging out in the ER and watching for "regular" returnees; probably even gets a fee from Orpheus for reporting NDEs. That's the only explanation you have for Orpheus calling and offering you a job after that last incident. So, when they made the offer, you jumped on it. You didn't care about the salary, benefits or anything else. Whatever they offered, it would be a lot better than waiting for the next pigment junkie to wave a weapon in your face. Hell, you'd even work in their cafeteria if it meant being away from a cash register.

Attributes: (6/4/3) Social/Mental/Physical Abilities: (11/7/4) Skills/Talents/Knowledges

Talents: Alertness, Athletics, Empathy, Streetwise

Skills: Firearms
Knowledges: Enigmas

Variations

Medium — Street Bookie (Add +1 to Attributes, +4 to Abilities and +2 to Backgrounds)

High—Crack House Money Handler, Underground Casino Cashier (Add +1 to Attributes, +8 to Abilities, +3 to Backgrounds and +2 to Willpower)

ROLE: ECO-TERRORIST

Description: People don't understand. You can't afford to wait for the world to wake up. Nature is dying; progress turns forest into parking lots; rivers become sewage treatment facilities or chemical dumping grounds; air pollution increases every hour.... As long as companies worship the almighty dollar, they'll see Mother Nature as another PR ploy.

At first, you wrote letters. Then you attended fund-raisers, donating to environmental charities. You thought sending your pocket change to friendly groups would clean up the atmosphere and save endangered species. You were wrong. Those friendly groups with the fuzzy animal symbols wasted your donations on bureaucratic expenses. Half of those environmental charities



received their funding from the same corporations bent on destroying wildlife. You tried to go into politics, but you couldn't convince people to give you the clout and resources to win.

You had no options and did what everyone else was afraid to do. If companies violated environmental laws, you attacked them. You committed acts of sabotage, stole important plans and hacked into large computer systems. You're at war, fighting to save the environment. You don't want to hurt people, but they must stop polluting. If people can't conserve what remains of nature, then the global ecosystem will fail. By the time people accept responsibility for protecting the environment, it'll be too late.

Your enemies have taught you some hard lessons. Security guards beat you, shot you and almost martyred you. You screwed up along the way too, especially one time with a defective homemade bomb.

Your name reached someone with influence, because after your last crusade, you found yourself blacklisted by environmental groups. Even the more radical types seem afraid to deal with you, but this outfit called Orpheus wants you to work for them. Everything else you've done to make the world better has had little impact. Maybe Orpheus can train you to be more valuable to the cause. You'll work with them for now, but ultimately you'll use them to help save the world.

Attributes: (6/4/3) Mental/Physical/Social Abilities: (11/7/4) Skills/Talents/Knowledges

Talents: Alertness, Athletics, Expression, Intimidation

Skills: Animal Ken, Crafts, Melee, Security, Stealth, Survival

Knowledges: Computer, Finance, Law, Politics, Science

Variations

Medium — Green Party Activist (Add +1 to Attributes, +3 to Abilities and +4 to Backgrounds)

High — Rainbow Warrior, World-renowned Environmentalist (Add +2 to Attributes, +7 to Abilities and +6 to Backgrounds)

ROLE: EMERGENCY ROOM DOCTOR

Description: Some doctors have quiet practices, where an emergency may include a broken toe or a skinned knee. They go home every night to their large houses and golf every second Friday of the month. If something serious happens, they send people to the hospital. They have their place in the medical profession, but it's not the same as yours.

In your world, every second counts. Gunshot wounds, stabbings and drug overdoses are part and parcel of your daily grind. Other people watch ER dramas as entertain-

ment, but you've spent your time in those emergency rooms trying to patch people back together so they can return to the streets and hurt each other again. You have a trick to protect yourself. You adopt a cold, unaffected façade, so even the most tragic events don't bother you. It works for a while. At least until you're alone. Then the whole terrible drama replays before you.

It amazes you how much work it takes to save people. Some patients are so messed up that you haven't a clue where to begin putting them back together; and when they wake up, they try to kill you. A patient stabbed you once as he was going under sedation; your nurse never left scalpels near a shooting victim again. Your least favorites were the idiots who fought their gang wars in your trauma center waiting room. You tried stopping them and needed surgery yourself. The police ended the fight, leaving you with two bodies for the morgue.

You joined Orpheus to continue helping others. Orpheus has the technology to make a real difference in the world. Now, you keep agents alive in cryogenic sleep and stay ready for any emergency. Given your brushes with the afterlife, perhaps you should visit the other side.

Attributes: (6/4/3) Mental/Social/Physical

Abilities: (11/7/4) Knowledges/Skills/Talents

Talents: Brawl, Empathy, Intimidation, Leadership

Skills: Melee, Security, Technology

Knowledges: Academics, Bureaucracy, Medicine, Politics, Science

Variations

Medium — War Zone Medic (Add +1 to Attributes and +5 to Abilities)

High — World Renowned Surgeon (Add +2 to Attributes, +8 to Abilities and +4 to Backgrounds; must take Backgrounds in Resources and Contacts)

ROLE: FIREFIGHTER

Description: All your life, you wanted to make a difference. You joined the fire department for two reasons. First, to save lives. Second, to experience the thrill of facing down fires. You wanted to be a real-world hero.

As a firefighter, you risked your life almost daily. When something went down, you were the first person on the truck. You wanted to be on the scene, charging in to help.

Nothing was more dangerous than a burning building. The roof could collapse. The floor could cave in. Something could ignite and explode. The noise and smoke might confuse you, blocking your retreat. You've experienced it all. You reached that point where only fate decided whether you lived or died in far too many situations. Nothing fazes you anymore.

Ultimately, injury and a cowardly fire chief drove you from what you love. A piece of falling debris struck

you in the back, after a fire was out, popping a disc out of alignment. The department offered you disability. The Fire Department would let you spend the rest of your days filing papers, while the others were on the front lines. You couldn't imagine sitting at a desk, so you resigned, hoping to join another Fire Department.

Instead, Orpheus approached you, curious about your repeated brushes with death. You spent some time with them and learned there were other fires to fight.

Attributes: (6/4/3) Physical/Mental/Social Abilities: (11/7/4) Talents/Skills/Knowledges

Talents: Alertness, Athletics, Empathy, Intuition, Leadership

Skills: Animal Ken, Drive, Melee, Security Knowledges: Enigmas, Investigation, Medicine Variations

Medium — Oil-Well Firefighter (Add +1 to Attributes, +5 to Abilities; must have Science)

High — Smoke Jumper (+4 to Attributes, +5 to Abilities; must have Survival)

ROLE: FISHERMAN

Description: Living on a fishing vessel was one of the craziest things you've ever done. The way you saw it, the pay was good and you could spend your life on the sea. You never imagined the power of an ocean storm. Nothing compared to being lashed to a rail while 30-foot waves crashed over your ship. If you went overboard, no one would ever find your body.

Even on a good day, hauling in the nets could kill. Half the catch might cut a man open or sting him with a deadly neurotoxin. Even dead things put up a fight when lifeless bodies twitched from reflex. Everyone suffered scrapes and wounds. You were poisoned once, but you pulled through the delirium and didn't lose any limbs. You were lucky. If things went seriously wrong, there wasn't any hope of reaching a hospital in time.

The heavy machinery was deadly as well. If a hook supporting a loaded ton—heavy net gave way at the wrong time, you'd be crushed. If your harness got caught in the wrong cables, the machines could pull you into the gears and pulverize you. When the storms did happen, the heavy stuff might break free, smashing anyone in the wrong place to a pulp.

Despite the hardships, you endured, returning to the sea again and again. Perhaps you'll return again one day, but your last voyage ended in disaster. A freak storm sank your ship and only you and another mate reached a lifeboat. Unfortunately, you went through the food and water quickly. You lay there in the lifeboat, hoping someone would find you, baking in the sun. You were too weak to move. After days of drifting, however, another fishing vessel found you close to death. During your time adrift, you remember the sun changing into a

softer gentler light while you stared at the sky. You have vague memories of voices.

You didn't sleep well after the rescue. You felt, well... haunted by your experience. You contacted Orpheus, and they asked you to work for them. It can't be any crazier than the fishing boat.

Attributes: (6/4/3) Physical/Social/Mental Abilities: (11/7/4) Skills/Talents/Knowledges Talents: Athletics, Brawl, Intimidation

Skills: Crafts, Melee, Survival Knowledges: Medicine, Occult

Variations

Medium — Diver (Add +1 to Attributes and +5 to Abilities)

High — Ocean Explorer (Add +3 to Attributes, +7 to Abilities and +1 to Backgrounds)

ROLE: GANG MEMBER

Description: Your gang was your religion. They were your friends and your true family. Your pride, your self-esteem... everything came from the gang. You bled for them, and you killed to protect them.

Papers reported "incidents" and "activities," but for you, those events were life itself. You fought wars with rival gangs and turned the tables on the Man. On your turf, you were a prince. Your gang ruled with fists, knives and guns. Sure, sometimes you capped an innocent, but that was the bitch about life... it was brutal and short.

Now, life has changed. You took three shots during the last war, one in the arm, one in the chest and the last one in the skull. The shot in the arm passed through, leaving a big hole, but it healed nicely. The shot in the chest punctured a lung, but it didn't do much more. The doctor said the bullet to your head hit at just the right angle to ricochet off. You don't know if you agree with him. You think you died. You don't know why you're still here.

Days dragged in the hospital. You woke to that antiseptic smell and some old nurse trying to be your mom. You had visitors — cops — who never let you sleep. Every single day, they kept coming to you with questions. They asked about drugs and your gang and all sorts of crazy shit that you really didn't have a clue about. They never believed a word you said, even when you just told the truth. You kept waiting to get out, to escape the daily interrogations. You wanted revenge on the guys who put you through this torture.

When you got out, you had real problems. Your gang didn't trust you anymore. You heard the whispers: How did he survive the shooting? Maybe he's with them? What did he tell the cops? Is he a snitch? Did he make a deal? Do you think he's wearing a wire? You explained it over and over, but they gave you the same looks that

the damned cops had given you. We don't believe a fucking word. That's what they were thinking.

You thought these assholes were your friends. You thought they understood how much you sacrificed for them. One extended stay in a hospital and they all turned on you. Fucking hell! You nearly died for them, and they still didn't trust you! You weren't safe, but you weren't going to be a victim either. You heard about Orpheus and contacted them for an interview about your "NDEs." You went to the interview, hoping for some easy cash for your story. Instead, they offered you a job. Orpheus saved you, but you won't stay with them forever. You have some serious debts to settle back home. Once you learn what Orpheus can teach you, you'll be fucking over some people on the streets for payback.

Attributes: (6/4/3) Physical/Social/Mental Abilities: (11/7/4) Talents/Skills/Knowledges Talents: Athletics, Brawl, Intimidation, Streetwise Skills: Drive, Etiquette, Firearms, Melee, Stealth Knowledges: Investigation, Law

Variations

Medium — Undercover agent posing as a gang member (Add +1 to Attributes and +5 to Abilities; must have Performance)

High — Reformed Gang Leader (Add +2 to Attributes and +10 to Abilities)

ROLE: INNER-CITY GRADUATE

Description: You're nobody special, but you did something special with your life. You grew up in the roughest part of the inner city, and you made it out in one piece with an education and no record. You lived on a razor's edge, but you never lost your balance.

It wasn't easy. Luck smiled on you and several good people helped you make it. Your grandparents raised you in the projects. They taught you strong values. Your grandfather wanted to ensure you had a moral foundation to protect you in the tough times. Your grandmother always listened to your problems first and passed judgment second. Mr. Howard, your high school math teacher, took the time to pull your head out of your ass when he caught you trying drugs after school. He understood that angels became victims, but he also verbally beat it into you that drugs lead to death and jail.

Even with good people trying to help, you came close to not making it. A party turned lethal when some so-called friend, drugged everyone. The asshole spiked the drinks and tainted the food. The paramedics found him dead on his toilet. You made it home in time for your grandfather to get you to the ER. Your heart stopped once in the trauma center, but the doctors revived you.

Working during the summer, you collapsed on a construction site from dehydration and heat exhaustion. Mr. Smith, the foreman, just kept screaming at you to move your lazy ass. You'll never forget that feeling of wanting to vomit and pass out at the same time. Thank God someone realized you weren't faking. In the ambulance, you died. You saw the paramedics and your body with the I.V. There was a bright light, more brilliant than the sun, but it didn't hurt your eyes when you stared at it. Then, God spoke to you. He reminded you of your grandfather. God said you had to live and graduate. You thought it was a dream, but the next month you took the wrong street home from the site. You turned a corner and gunfire exploded all around you. Blood, flesh and bone splattered you while you dove to the cement. You caught a glimpse of gangsters with some heavy weapons mowing down everything that moved. When the shooting stopped, you started breathing again. If anything convinced you that God had a plan, surviving that shooting did it.

Both of your grandparents died the summer before your graduation. They left you enough money to make it through that year, and you toughed it out on your own. Before they passed on, you swore to both of them that you would make something of yourself. One day, you'll return to the hood and help save someone, like Mr. Howard helped you.

Orpheus hired you because of your NDEs and they think that makes you special. Well, if they think so, more power to them. What distinguished you was all the hard times you survived and the fact you know your grandparents watch over you. Still, Orpheus has given you an opportunity. Now, it's up to you to make the best of it.

Attributes: (6/4/3) Social/Mental/Physical Abilities: (11/7/4) Talents/Skills/Knowledges Talents: Alertness, Awareness, Intuition, Streetwise Skills: Drive, Firearms, Stealth, Technology Knowledges: Academics, Computer

Variations

Medium—Inner City Teacher (Add +1 to Attributes and +5 to Abilities)

High — Street Protector (Add +2 to Attributes, +6 to Abilities, +2 to Backgrounds and +2 to Willpower)

ROLE: JANE DOE

Description: You haven't a clue who you are or how you got here. Something bad happened to you. Some Samaritan found you lying beside a major road, nearly dead. By the time you arrived at the hospital, the paramedics thought they had lost you. They pronounced you dead upon arrival in the ER, but only moments later, a moan escaped your lips. Much to everyone's surprise, the doctors revived you.

While you recovered, a nurse asked you simple questions about your name, occupation, home address... things that you should know. A cold fear gnawed at you. You couldn't answer a single question. You honestly didn't remember. Everyone asked you questions. When you couldn't answer, they asked you more questions. They drew blood samples, inked your fingers and even took pictures of you. Police investigators, medical staff, even a psychologist who seemed convinced you were lying kept trying to "help" you remember. Frustration welled up inside you. You didn't know where to go or who to trust. Had someone tried killing you? Did you have friends, family or a lover desperately looking for you? You didn't know if you had insurance to pay the hospital.

Orpheus read about you and interviewed you on a lark. They, and you, were shocked to discover that you had the right stuff to project. In some way you were a survivor of multiple NDEs.... Orpheus paid your bills and provided for you. They helped immensely. Now, you don't have to worry about where to live or your finances. You have food, shelter and a job with Orpheus. You still can't answer any of the big questions and neither can Orpheus. As you do your work, you keep remembering fragments of your past. You have flashes of insight on the strangest subjects. You hope Orpheus can someday help you find out who you are.

Attributes: (6/4/3) Mental/Physical/Social Abilities: (11/7/4) Knowledges/Skills/Talents Talents: Athletics, Awareness, Empathy, Intuition Skills: Meditation, Stealth, Survival, Technology

Knowledges: Academics, Enigmas, Investigation, Occult

Variations

Medium — Competent Jane Doe (Add +1 to Attributes and +5 to Abilities)

High — Complete Savant Mystery (Add +2 to Attributes and +10 to Abilities)

ROLE: JOURNALIST

Description: Curiosity rules your life... you never could steer clear of a mystery. You explored the haunted house at the end of the street. You asked tough questions of authority figures, even when it landed you in trouble in junior high. You have a gift for knowing when someone's hiding something. You want to set the truth free.

Becoming a reporter was your natural career path. During idealistic moments you thought you could change the world, but other times you wanted a Pulitzer, fame and riches. You loved following stories to the end, no matter where they led. If you ruffled a few feathers in the underworld or in the halls of government, then so much the better. You loved exposing liars.

You were never comfortable with death threats, but they were part of your life. You made many enemies, and one of them tried killing you. You parked on your way to work, opened the car door and gunshots echoed through the garage. A bullet ripped a hole in your chest. Before you passed out, you heard the squeal of tires. You had a near death experience before waking up to an audience of doctors. You were lucky.

The experience shook you, but it wasn't over. The news director fired you as soon as you returned to work. Every one of your reviews had been glowing. You knew you had powerful enemies, but you didn't know who they were. Your problem wasn't that you couldn't come up with anyone; you simply had too many potential suspects.

Losing your job crushed you. You called the competition and they hung up. No one gave you the time of day. You never thought about giving up and devised a plan. You'd go freelance. All you needed was a big story, one that no one could ignore. You found Orpheus.

You investigated the Orpheus Group, and as you learned more your curiosity grew. If Orpheus could contact the dead, then how many mysteries could they solve? Dreams of interviewing Jack Ruby filled your head. You changed tactics and joined Orpheus. Now you need to discover whether their claims are real. If they are, how many secrets can you uncover by speaking to the dead?

Attributes: (6/4/3) Mental/Social/Physical Abilities: (11/7/4) Knowledges/Talents/Skills

Talents: Alertness, Empathy, Expression, Streetwise, Subterfuge

Skills: Etiquette, Performance, Security, Stealth Knowledges: Bureaucracy, Computer, Investigation Variations

Medium — Crime Correspondent, Tabloid Journalist (Add +1 to Attributes, +4 to Abilities and +2 to Backgrounds)

High — War Correspondent, Storm Chaser, Topnotch Investigative Reporter (Add +2 to Attributes, +5 to Abilities, +4 to Backgrounds and +2 to Willpower)

ROLE: MOUNTAIN CLIMBER

Description: You don't know what drove you to challenge that first peak. Maybe you wanted to conquer nature. Maybe you needed to prove something to yourself. Maybe it was because the mountain was there. One thing's certain, people don't understand what drives you. They think you should live a normal life, go about your job, instead of saving for these expeditions. They see danger as heavy traffic during their commute. They'll never know what keeps you going. They will never experience the glory of watching the sunrise from a summit.

The danger always beckoned you. Nothing is like a night on a mountainside, as you cling to rock with gale

force winds roaring outside. Nature pushed your body and your spirit to its limit. It's you against the worst that nature can throw at you. You've made mistakes. Attempting to climb without oxygen gave you visions and left you crawling through the snow. Rescue climbers found you suffering from pulmonary edema, then airlifted you to safety out of the base camp. You survived an avalanche that almost buried you alive and countless bouts with hypothermia. You lost a few bits of your extremities to frostbite, but that was better than gangrene. Maybe it's all finally gotten to you. You need to know more. Why do you push the limits of life? What lies beyond?

You came to Orpheus after your last expedition ended in a nightmare. A sudden storm trapped you and your party on the side of a mountain for two nights. Rescuers found you, delirious, clutching the remains of a former friend. You were the only survivor. You don't remember anything but the storm. Perhaps through Orpheus you can find resolution and peace. You know about life, now you will learn about death.

Attributes: (6/4/3) Mental/Physical/Social Abilities: (11/7/4) Talents/Skills/Knowledges Talents: Alertness, Athletics, Intuition Skills: Crafts, Meditation, Survival

Knowledges: Linguistics, Medicine, Science

Variations

Medium — Extreme Rock Climber, Rescue Climber (Add +2 to Attributes, +1 to Abilities and +1 to Willpower)

High — Eco-Challenge Racer, Everest Guide (Add +3 to any Attributes, +4 to Abilities, +1 to Backgrounds and +2 to Willpower)

ROLE: POLICE OFFICER

Description: You were the law. Sworn to protect and uphold society's rules, you had the training and will to defend your badge. The law is what you made it, whether you held to high principles or walked a thin line between yourself and the people you put behind bars.

No one prepared you for the harsh realities of life as a cop. You saw the dark sides of more people than you care to mention. The difference between a criminal and an upstanding citizen was timing. You grew bitter, but you had reasons.

Following a tough career from the beginning, you wanted to prove yourself, so you took chances. You wrecked two squad cars during pursuits. You rushed in on a couple of suspects instead of waiting for backup. They fired first and you went down. The next time, you shot first. That time, you killed the wrong guy. Department politics took their toll on you as well. When you learned about a cop on the take, Internal Affairs told you to mind your own business. Cops take care of their own, they said. No one took the time to take care of you.



The daily deluge of the worst aspects of human behavior was too much. You reminded yourself that all people weren't scum. Each day, you had a harder time believing that, especially when slick lawyers would ruin a year's investigation and let scum walk due to some technicality. It made you sick.

Finally, you looked for a new career. You wanted options. When you joined the academy, you hoped to bring justice to the world. The law wasn't justice. Being a cop wasn't working for you.

Orpheus now gives you the opportunities to make a difference. Scum who are beyond the law can't escape Orpheus. You'll make sure justice is served.

Attributes: (6/4/3) Physical/Mental/Social **Abilities:** (11/7/4) Knowledges/Skills/Talents

Talents: Alertness, Athletics, Brawl, Intimidation, Streetwise

Skills: Drive, Firearms, Melee, Security, Stealth **Knowledges:** Bureaucracy, Computer, Investigation, Law

Must take Backgrounds to justify authority

Variations

Medium — Homicide Detective, Anti-Gang Taskforce (Add +1 to any Attribute, +2 to Abilities, +3 to Backgrounds and +1 to Willpower)

High — ESU Sniper, Undercover Agent (Add +2 to Attributes, +5 to Abilities, +4 to Backgrounds and +2 to Willpower)

ROLE: PROSTITUTE

Description: You wonder why you turned that first trick. Was it to hurt your family for not loving you enough as a child? Was it for the excitement? Were you that desperate for money? Didn't matter... stopping was definitely harder than starting.

You enjoyed your career for a while. The money was better than you dreamed and you developed a reputation that kept men coming back for more. Once you had them in bed, they all talked. You learned about local politics, business and sports. You had information that you could use to invest, gamble or sell for the right price and you liked the presents your regulars brought you.

The downside made up for the good parts. Cops harassed you and Officer Martin was your nonpaying customer. He searched you for weapons once a week, taking the time to feel all over. Your pimp beat the hell out of you as an introduction. The good money went away with him around. Of course, he was never around when you needed protecting. Once the money dried up, the johns got worse and you worried more about diseases you could catch with AIDS, herpes and everything else making the rounds. The ones who liked it "rough" drove you to the hospital afterward. A few psychos wanted to share needles with you. Mr. "Sex, drugs and rock 'n'

roll" kept asking to trade favors for a pharmacy of drugs he carried around.

The other girls were also a problem. You talked to them, traded war stories, but at the end of the night, they were competition. An argument turned into a knife-fight one week. You won, but she cut you badly enough that you missed a week on the streets. Your pimp added injury to injury when you couldn't pay him.

When the recruiter from Orpheus pulled over to let you in his car, you had no idea that he would change your life. You don't know how they discovered you. Maybe the CEO was a former customer, but after everything you'd survived, you definitely had the qualifications to flirt with death. If Orpheus can keep you safe and off the street, maybe you can give management some freebies?

Attributes: (6/4/3) Social/Physical/Mental Abilities: (11/7/4) Talents/Skills/Knowledges

Talents: Alertness, Empathy, Expression, Intuition, Streetwise, Subterfuge

Skills: Etiquette, Melee, Performance, Stealth

Knowledges: Law, Politics

Variations

Medium — Exotic Dancer, Call Girl (Add +1 to Attributes and +5 to Abilities; must have Performance and Athletics)

High — Political Escort (Add +3 to Attributes, +5 to Abilities and +5 to Backgrounds: must have Backgrounds with Contacts)

ROLE: REFORMED CRIMINAL

Description: No one who hasn't spent time in prison can really understand it. You believe everyone should spend a weekend in jail. If everyone on the outside learned to appreciate their freedoms, we'd have a more decent society.

You made a mistake. You didn't think about the victims, and you don't even really know why you committed the crime. You wish you could go back, grab your younger self and shake some sense into him. The police caught you, and the system made an example of you.

You thought you were tough. You could take anything... you were invincible, the king of the world. Then, those steel bars slammed behind you and you learned what hard really meant. One of several things happened to people in prison. Some just shut down and fell apart. Others went crazy, ready to fight to the death to prove their "innocence," just looking for trouble while becoming worse and meaner than they were before. You watched the madness turn shoplifters and drug users into psychotics who'd knife you as soon as look at you. During a riot, you foolishly tried to prevent some inmates from killing a guard. After the riot ended, the guards found your beaten body stuffed in a locker.

You *learned* from the riot. Nobody would ever beat you like that again, not the guards and not the prisoners. Anything anyone taught you, you soaked up. You learned how to kill, how to break into a place, how to hack into a computer system. You'd make a much better criminal today, but you also learned about character and self-respect. You are never going back. You saw people die in prison.

After you paid your debt to society, Orpheus made you an offer because you'd had some near-death experiences. Hell, it felt like every day in prison was near death. You want to cut the past loose, but you can talk about almost dying if it lands you a steady job. You're ready to start over and live your life.

Attributes: (6/4/3) Physical/Mental/Social Abilities: (11/7/4) Talents/Skills/Knowledges

Talents: Alertness, Athletics, Brawl, Empathy, Intimidation, Streetwise

Skills: Crafts, Drive, Melee, Security, Stealth **Knowledges:** Computer, Investigation, Law

Variations

Medium—Career Criminal, Mob—Enforcer turned Informer (Add +6 to Abilities and +3 to Backgrounds)

High — Bad-Ass Robin Hood, Modern Day Count of Monte Cristo (Add +2 to Attributes, +8 to Abilities and +4 to Backgrounds)

ROLE: SECURITY GUARD

Description: They could have given you a gun. That's all you really wanted. You remember your instructions. If there's real trouble, call the cops and hide. Obviously, hiding was the ultimate deterrent against crime. On the other hand, they also told you to remain visible. Security doesn't matter if people don't realize it's there. Of course, if they know you're there, then they'll take you out....

You were screwed either way.

Everyone in the city at night was packing, except you. Instead management gave you pepper spray, mace and a solid flashlight. Now, a high quality metal flashlight isn't a bad thing, unless the other guy has a *gun*. No wonder you nearly died several times. You had one good moment, and that was when you surprised some punk, shoved your mace up to his nose and sprayed. You felt kind of bad at how quickly he collapsed, and after the ambulance carted away his motionless body you wondered if you had killed him.

The firm always received strange contracts; you did security for a mortuary, thinking it would be a cakewalk, but no, a bunch of lunatic cultists broke in. They beat the hell out of you and messed with the bodies. Then there was the time guarding the technologies company. You walked your rounds, turned a corner and blacked out; those industrial espionage types were professionals. You still don't know what

happened. At least those were both better than working mall parking lots during the holidays or walking the rounds on college campuses. Half the drunk frat guys were looking for a fight, but universally the flashlight took care of them.

You read an article somewhere about Orpheus. It didn't say much, but the group seemed far more interesting than your current life. When they approached you, you didn't even consider saying no. You made just one demand: You wanted a gun.

Attributes: (6/4/3) Social/Mental/Physical Abilities: (11/7/4) Talents/Skills/Knowledges Talents: Alertness, Athletics, Brawl, Intimidation

Skills: Firearms, Melee, Security, Stealth

Knowledges: Law, Medicine

Variations

Medium — Private Investigator (Add +1 to Attributes, +4 to Abilities and +2 to Backgrounds; must take Investigation and Detective License)

High — Personal Bodyguard (Add +3 to Attributes, +6 to Abilities and +1 to Willpower)

ROLE: SOLDIER

Description: When you signed on for military service, you didn't know what to expect. You read the briefings, spoke with veterans and saw documentaries, but nothing prepared you for the real thing. Although you knew no drill sergeant would kill a recruit during basic training, your sergeant ensured you understood that accidents could happen. He once said, "It's not a matter of whether you'll break or even when. Everyone breaks. It's about how fast you get back up."

Some soldiers spend their tours of duty in quiet places. You missed that option. You traveled to the world's hot spots, engaging in firefights in Bosnia, Afghanistan and Southeast Asia. You enjoyed the action but hated the aftermath. One time you had to bury an entire village. Most of those people were innocent, just trapped in the wrong place. You watched a buddy step on a land mine. Fragments of his bones nearly killed you.

As your tour wore on, the poverty and suffering in war-torn regions took its toll. The military was your home and your fellow soldiers were family, but compared to the suffering you witnessed, your career and friends weren't enough to keep your spirit strong. You didn't re-enlist and chose civilian life instead.

You went back to the States, enthusiastic about the possibilities for your future. Once you were a civilian, however, the world returned your excitement with apathy. No one cared about your service. Greed replaced honor and duty for most people you met. You missed the support of your friends.

You searched for a job with meaning and discovered Orpheus, which recruited you. The organization makes

you feel more at home. They have a unity of purpose similar to the military. Now, you just need to discover what they're going to do to break you. You hope you'll get back up quickly enough.

Attributes: (6/4/3) Physical/Mental/Social **Abilities:** (11/7/4) Skills/Talents/Knowledges

Talents: Alertness, Athletics, Brawl, Intimidation, Leadership

Skills: Firearms, Melee, Stealth, Survival

Knowledges: Law

Variations

Medium — Specialist, Officer (Add +1 to Attributes and +5 to Abilities)

High — Special Forces (Add +3 to Attributes, +6 to Abilities and +1 to Willpower)

ROLE: TRUCH DRIVER

Description: The highways were your home. You lived on your rig, traveling from truck stop to truck stop, long days mixed with long nights. You had a few friends on the road, but mostly you listened to radio stations and tried remembering the name of the waitress at the next stop. You learned to make friends out of strangers, at least for a night.

Companies never cared about you. They all fed you the same lines. Everything needed delivery as quickly as possible, but don't drive over the speed limit and don't spend too many hours on the road. You never saw a job on paper where you could keep your drive hours down and stick to the speed limit. The real test of a truck driver was how long you could stay awake. A lot of guys popped pills to help, but you tried sticking to hot coffee.

The only people you trusted worked in the garages. They always had a list of stuff to fix on the rig, but you knew that management made them send you on the road before everything was completed. The mechanics always told you something might go wrong so that, when you did break down, you had a good hunch for what had happened. You hated it when they told you to listen to the brakes.

One problem with driving too long is that accidents happen. There's no way to avoid them, especially when too much can happen on the roads. You drive too long in bad conditions with bad drivers around you and wham! Someone in a little car is dead.

The biggest problem with accidents is cargo, since you never really know what you're hauling. The company tells you one thing, but what ends up in the back can be another matter entirely. You had medical waste spill out all over an interstate one time when you thought you had medical supplies, but the worst one was a batch of chemicals you thought was fertilizer. Another rig smashed into you and your truck became an inferno.

You jumped out of the cab and ran a good distance, thinking you were safe. A few seconds later, your skin was burning and you threw up along the shoulder of the road. Thankfully, you don't remember much after that, just some gentle dreams. The docs said you nearly died. Ever since, you've had flashes of those dreams whenever you suffered a close call.

You told a receiving lady at Orpheus about your dreams while you delivered some giant tubes to them. She had you inside interviewing before you finished unloading. By the end of the night, you had a new home. You don't have to live life on the road, and you have much nicer paychecks on the way. Now, you just need to learn what Orpheus expects you to deliver.

Attributes: (6/4/3) Mental/Social/Physical Abilities: (11/7/4) Talents/Skills/Knowledges

Talents: Alertness, Empathy, Streetwise, Subterfuge

Skills: Drive

Knowledges: Bureaucracy

Variations

Medium — Military Transport Driver (Add +1 to Attributes and +5 to Abilities; must have Drive)

High — Race Car Driver (Add +2 to Attributes and +10 to Abilities; must have Drive)

PERSONALITY ARCHETYPES: NATURE AND DEMEANOR

We change how we act depending on whether we're with our parents, siblings, children, friends, enemies, store clerks, the boss at work... but each of us follows a few favored strategies for dealing with other individuals. Some people prefer adopting a confrontational or aggressive stance; others would rather defer or seek to please. Some people are highly emotional; others prefer calm analysis; still others are social chameleons, mimicking the people around them.

Often, we do not show how we really feel, or we disguise our strategies. A shy or frightened person may act aggressive to keep threatening people at a distance. A cold and ruthless exploiter may act like everyone's best friend. By masking our true fears, desires and attitudes, we try controlling how other people treat us. It isn't really deceit; or if it is, we often fool ourselves as much as we trick anyone else.

Orpheus uses Traits called Nature and Demeanor to describe how characters approach the world and other people. Instead of a number, we represent Nature and Demeanor by brief descriptions and one-word names, called Archetypes. Think of the Archetypes

as capsule versions of how you intend to play your character. We describe 52 of these Archetypes later in the chapter.

An **Orpheus** character's Nature expresses her fundamental goals and approach to life. It embodies your character's identity, what she wants and how she pursues her goals. A character's Demeanor describes the mask she most often presents to the world. Most mortals adopt a Demeanor close to their Nature; most folks just don't work that hard to don a false face.

Demeanor has no game effect at all. It exists purely to help you remember how to play your character.

Nature has a great many game effects. It is among an **Orpheus** character's most important Traits. Nature becomes especially paramount for ghosts, because only the living have a Demeanor. The dead are simpler in some ways. Their ruling passions are laid bare. They exist, after all, because some deep desire drove them to endure after death. Even a feeble drone has performed one astonishing act of will. Such powerful drives fall under the purview of Nature.

Ghosts, projectors and ordinary mortals all benefit from acting according to their Nature. Doing what you really want, successfully — however you define success — boosts your self-confidence and strength of purpose. Every time a character fulfills the requirement of her Nature Archetype, that character may regain a point of spent Willpower (see p. 199), if the Storyteller permits.

This does not happen incredibly often. Circumstances rarely permit characters to act entirely as their Nature suggests. We do not intend Archetypes as straitjackets that constrain your actions at every moment; they merely express preferences and habits. Only the insane follow a single course and a single emotional tenor regardless the situation.

A character's Shade also expresses something about her personality, so you should not be surprised that Natures associate with particular Shades. Nature also plays a role in determining a character's initial Vitality, Spite and Willpower. Furthermore, ghosts and projectors can wield special powers over other spooks who fall within their Shade's cluster of Natures (even if they choose a Nature outside their Shade's grouping).

NATURE AND OTHER TRAITS

Vitality, Spite and Willpower all represent aspects of a ghost's personality and strength of purpose. A character's Nature suggests something about her general enthusiasm for life and empathy for other people; hence, it contributes to Vitality. Nature also suggests the grip that destructive or self-destructive passions may hold over a ghost, and so it influences Spite. A

character's self-confidence and perseverance, the domain of Willpower, also clearly connect to her Nature. Each Archetype description, therefore, includes a note about how many Vitality, Spite and Willpower points that Nature adds to a character.

NATURES AND SHADES

Each Shade associates with a cluster of six to eight Natures. Sometimes the connection between a Shade and Nature is obvious; in other cases, it may seem obscure. Shades describe broad, general ways to approach existence, so each one accommodates diverse Natures that may seem opposed to each other at first glance. For instance, what could link a deceptive Rogue and a truth-seeking Judge? Both share an aspect of emotional separation from others — the Rogue to exploit them, the Judge to preserve his impartiality. What's more, both Archetypes carry an edge of aggression. A Rogue obviously seeks people to use and cheat, but consider the Judge's assumption of superiority, that he has the right to say what's true and who's correct, and to foist his judgment upon others. They are more alike than either might wish... and Orpheus finds that such similarities are more than superficial. They have real effects.

That said, and as previously mentioned, the Nature clusters associated with each Shade are not written in stone. Players may pick a Nature for their character outside their Shade's recommendations; the Default Abilities, however, still apply to that specific Nature and to those associated by Shade.

DEFAULT ABILITIES: THE TIES THAT BIND

Orpheus learned that common psychological factors create a link between all ghosts and projectors of the same Shade. By expending her own Vitality, a ghost or projector can strengthen that link to affect another spook's emotions — or his very substance.

Characters can use only the first power, Detect Nature Group, without alerting the target. All the other innate, Nature-based powers require that the character touch the other ghost to connect to his Vitality.

DETECT NATURE GROUP

Characters can sense which group of Natures a person fits within, and therefore know another spook's Shade without witnessing her powers. What's more, a character can sense the general Nature of a living person, and thereby know what Shade the mortal would become if he became a ghost or projector. Remember, ghosts and projectors cannot use this (or any other) power when they are clothed in flesh.

NATURE GROUPINGS

Orpheus psychologists find that Natures exist in eight clusters, translated into game terms as follows:

Banshee: Caregiver, Defender, Gallant, Martyr, Mediator, Penitent

Haunter: Dabbler, Explorer, Loner, Rebel, Socialite, Thrill-Seeker

Poltergeist: Bravo, Bumpkin, Critic, Judge, Masochist, Perfectionist, Rogue

Skinrider: Autocrat, Bureaucrat, Competitor, Director, Leader, Mentor, Pedagogue, Traditionalist

Wisp: Bon Vivant, Child, Conniver, Rake, Riddler, Trickster

Mystery Group 1: Architect, Avant-Garde, Celebrant, Dreamer, Gambler, Visionary

Mystery Group 2: Conformist, Curmudgeon, Fanatic, Follower, Scientist, Survivor

Mystery Group 3: Addict, Barbarian, Deviant, Grotesque, Monster, Wretch

To evaluate someone's Nature, a character's player need merely spend one point of Vitality while in the target's presence. The power does not require any dice roll from the player. The character does not know the target's exact Nature, only the cluster of related Natures — the Shade the target would manifest — with one exception. A ghost or projector can tell if the target shares her own exact Nature.

Knowing, at least, the broad outline of another character's personality helps you in social interactions. You know what Demeanor is most likely to appeal to the other person.

MISERY LOVES COMPANY

By expending one Vitality, a character can "empathize" with or attune himself to another ghost in the same cluster of Natures. For the rest of the scene, the empathizing character can twist the target ghost's emotions in her favor as long as the character can communicate verbally. The target feels great camaraderie to the empathizing ghost. Misery Loves Company does *not* work between ghosts of different Nature groupings.

Misery Loves Company takes a single action to perform. If the target ghost is actively willing, the empathizing ghost's player does not need to roll dice to make the power work. If one ghost does not want to link her Vitality to another ghost, or lacks enough sense of self to express an opinion (as with drones or many blips), the character's player must succeed at a

resisted Willpower roll to use this ability (of course, drones and blips don't have much Willpower.)

If the bond forms, the character's player receives two additional dice on all Social rolls directed at the target ghost. If the two share the exact same Nature, the bonus rises to four additional dice. This power often helps

ORPHEUS AND NATURE GROUPS

Detecting Nature groups seems very simple, but this power fascinates Orpheus' staff psychologists. Repeated tests show that different ghosts infallibly agree on a target person's Shade. Given a group of people, each ghost divides them into the same clusters. They have difficulty explaining the difference in personalities, but they feel it's there.

One of Orpheus' many small side-projects consists of recruiting people to take the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Survey and other psychological tests (typically, they pay a bunch of college students \$20 each to take the tests.) Ghosts and projected entities circulate among the test-takers and evaluate their potential Shade, communicating their assessments to projectors who compile the information. The psychologists then analyze the test results to determine what psychological traits link the people in each Shade. Orpheus believes that such research can at last place psychology on a rigorous, empirical footing.

Interestingly, the psychologists find *eight* personality clusters exist. Five of them correspond to the Shades. So far, the other three remain a mystery. Many Orpheus researchers themselves fall into two of the "mystery groups." The third cluster seems associated with a record of criminal behavior, drug abuse and other forms of social deviance and emotional disorders.

Naturally, the scientists cannot publish their complete research methodologies just yet. They plan to tell all someday, however, and expect Nobel Prizes for their work. Orpheus allows the psychologists to publish papers on limited aspects of the research, carefully purged of "ghostly mentions," so they can establish their priority. Other scientists guess the connection easily enough. If Dr. Jones publishes a remarkable new paper on personality assessment, and is known to work for "that ghost company," it doesn't take a genius to suspect a link.

the character break into a blip's routine, encouraging the target to talk to the empathizing ghost. The effects of Misery Loves Company last the rest of the scene. Subsequently, the character must restart the communication process when meeting the same ghost (unless the Storyteller rules the ghost has enough sense-of-self to remember the character).

SENSE LIFELINE

Regardless of whether a character and ghost share a Shade, one spook can use an empathic link to locate the factors preventing the other spirit from "moving on" to her ultimate fate. Orpheus finds that a ghost's existence is often tied to specific objects connected to the spirit's life and death, or deeds the ghost wishes fulfilled. For instance, the ghost of a murder victim might be mystically bound to the weapon that slew him. Ghosts of people who died with some important task not completed often wish to see that obligation fulfilled. The researchers dub these emotional bonds "tethers."

By spending a Vitality point, a ghost or projector gains clues to another ghost's tethers. This takes the form of a clairvoyant flash: For a few seconds, the empathizing ghost sees images related to the ghost's tethers, hears voices and feels emotions. Taste, scent and touch seldom occur in these dreamlike visions. The empathizing ghost may also receive a few disjointed words as guidance. After those clues, Sense Lifeline usually requires some investigation into a ghost's life and the circumstances of her death to uncover the exact tethers.

Unfortunately, ghosts can seldom give more specific information about their tethers because they themselves don't know. A ghost cannot sense his own tethers, though an intelligent ghost could certainly make some guesses. Blips and drones have so little sense of self that they need other spooks to identify the ties binding them to Earth. A ghost instantly knows a true tether once another character suggests it, though. You can jar a blip from his routine by telling the ghost one of his tethers. The blip can at least confirm that that object or action carries some importance, though not its current location or the means to fulfilling it.

See Chapter Four for lists of possible tethers. These are, of course, merely suggestions. Use them as inspiration when designing your own tethers for ghosts. See the Random Ghost Generation section (p. 260) for guidelines on how many tethers a particular ghost may possess.

SEVERTHE STRAND

Once a character understands why a person, object, place or event matters to a ghost, he must somehow resolve the ghost's "unfinished business" with said tether. This can entail many things. Perhaps the ghost wants justice for his murder, hence requiring the characters to apprehend and catch the perpetrator. Maybe, the

ghost wants to make sure his children will be safe (and knowing that the character is there looking in on them is enough), or is trapped by the regret of never saying goodbye (in which case the character becomes a messenger). The ghost may treasure a keepsake, requiring the characters to steal and bury it alongside the ghost's corpse. Such items and their possible connections are deliberately innumerable to allow the Storyteller the widest gamut of options in entertaining the players. Again, however, the Random Ghost Generation section (starting on p. 260) provides an ample helping of possibilities to help guide the Storyteller.

Once the character resolves a tether, he can break the ghost's connection to that tether through an intense empathic communion with the spirit. This requires at least a minute. By helping the ghost understand and resolve the issues binding him after death, characters can increase the spook's sense of self.

By breaking all of a ghost's tethers, characters can free her to move on to her ultimate fate. Some liberated ghosts rise into the proverbial shaft or tunnel of light. Others fall into a fissure that belches fire and reeks of brimstone, or a black vortex of clutching hands and screaming mouths sucks them down. Still other ghosts may quietly dissolve into nothing or vanish in some more idiosyncratic way. A liberated ghost's exit seems to depend significantly on what beliefs she held about the afterlife and the appropriate fate for someone like herself.

Infusing a ghost with knowledge of his tether and the resolution thereof costs a ghost or projector 10 Vitality points (after the investigation, at the point of communion). Only ghosts or projectors who share the same cluster of Natures can perform this act. Sever the Strand does not require a dice roll unless the ghost, for some reason, does not want his tether resolved. In that case, the character who wants to Sever the Strand must somehow immobilize the target ghost and the character's player must win a resisted Willpower roll before spending the 10 Vitality points.

Resolving a ghost's tether increases the target's Vitality rating by one, to a maximum of five. It also brings benefits to the character who severed the strand. The emotional fulfillment of this communion reinvigorates the character and purges her own negative emotions. The character's temporary Vitality rises to 10 points (including hues, since this is the only time they can become greater than themselves). The Storyteller may also deduct up to 5 temporary Spite points from the character, depending on the altruism of the character's motives. Helping a pitiful blip say goodbye to his wife might net the full award; raising the blip to full consciousness so you can use him as Spectre-bait probably would not.

If the characters help fully liberate a ghost, they may gain even greater rewards. One character — the one who, in the Storyteller's opinion, does the most to help the spirit — can lose one *permanent* Spite rating. This is a major reward for a character, but great deeds deserve commensurate rewards.

Characters could resolve all but one of a ghost's tethers. They could raise a ghost to full consciousness by removing tethers, but reserve the last tether as payment for some service. That isn't as noble as sending a ghost to his reward, but it can net the characters Contacts or Allies. Then again, some ghosts might not want all their tethers broken. They may have reason to fear their final disposition or want to stick around to pursue agendas of their own.

THIEVERY

The final use for a spook's empathic link is not so kind. A ghost or projector can wrest Vitality from another spook, initiating the violation at no Vitality cost. The attacker must touch the victim and share a target's Nature (either exactly or by virtue of Shade grouping). If these conditions are met, the character may attempt to siphon life essence from his target. After successfully making contact, the character engages in a contested Willpower roll (difficulty 6). If the character obtains more successes, he siphons away one point of Vitality

per net success beyond his target's successes. If he fails to acquire more successes than his target, he gains no Vitality (and, indeed, will likely be surrendering Vitality, if the target is also trying to siphon essence). Stealing life essence is rough on the psyche: Each time a character does so, the Storyteller must roll the character's Spite rating (difficulty 6), with each success cursing the character with a point of Spite. If a Vitality theft ends up turning a target into a Spectre (after having dropped him to zero Vitality and zero Willpower), the character immediately gains one Spite Rating.

PERSONALITY ARCHETYPES

Each Archetype consists of a paragraph describing its characteristic attitudes and practices, with examples of the sort of people who exhibit that Nature or Demeanor. A second paragraph tells how people with that Nature Archetype may regain Willpower points. The final line lists the Nature's contributions to a character's Vitality, Spite and Willpower.

No set of Archetypes can capture the wide array of human psychology. We encourage players and Storytellers to design new Archetypes of their own. The circumstances allowing a character to regain Willpower should not be easy, but should be feasible for a character



who works at it. Vitality, Spite and Willpower modifiers always add up to 5 points, with each modifier ranging from +0 to +3. Yes, this means that sometimes Spite exceeds the other two scores, but that's the way life (or death) goes. Some Natures are more hamstrung than others.

ADDICT

The Addict cannot get enough of a good thing... or maybe a bad one. For this Archetype, one source of pleasure becomes an obsession. People with this Archetype are more focused than the Bon Vivant (q.v.) who takes any pleasure he finds, and more dependent than the Celebrant (q.v.) who takes strength from her enthusiasm. An Addict has lost control of his craving. This Archetype often focuses on drugs or alcohol, but a certain person, place or activity can also form the basis of an addiction. Gamblers, workaholics and stalkers are less obvious examples of this Archetype.

— Regain a point of Willpower when you gorge yourself on your chosen addiction. Conversely, you cannot regain Willpower without this crutch.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +1 Spite: +3

The Architect finds purpose in building something new, which she sees as the best way to help others. Literal architects are one example, but inventors, entrepreneurs and town founders are also representative of this Archetype. A place, a machine, a community, a movement... Architects work in many ways to improve the world and provide for others, though sometimes that utopian vision may come at a cost. Sometimes, certain groups of people may suffer because an Architect's vision excludes them. A dictator who crushes all opposition can exemplify this Archetype, too.

— Regain a point of Willpower whenever you establish something of lasting worth or value.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +3 Spite: +1

The Autocrat wants power over other people. Some Autocrats genuinely believe that no one else can match their competence to lead. Others simply crave power, or fear anyone else having power over them. People with this Archetype often want everyone else to know they are in control, but they do not settle for the trappings of power — a true Autocrat wants the real thing. Charismatic CEOs, dictators, gang leaders, drill sergeants and office martinets are examples of this Archetype.

 Regain a point of Willpower when you gain control over a group or situation involving other individuals.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1, Willpower: +2, Spite: +2

AVANT-GARDE

The Avant-Garde is always ahead of the crowd. People with this Archetype need to be first — the first to know, to own, to follow the new fad. Novelty is a virtue for the Avant-Garde, and their greatest joy comes when other people emulate their choices. Fashion mavens, artists, gadget-heads and trend analysts are examples of Avant-Garde Archetypes.

— Regain a point of Willpower when you are first to announce important news or a discovery, or when you anticipate a popular fad.

Modifiers to Vitality: +2 Willpower: +2 Spite: +1 $\blacksquare \cap \square \cap \square$

The Barbarian no longer cleaves skulls with a battleax, but he'd like to. People with this Archetype reject both the rule of law and sneaking intrigue for personal strength and courage. Unlike the Bravo (q.v.), the Barbarian believes that simple contests of strength, will and cunning are "cleaner" than a civilization they view as convoluted and treacherous. People of the Barbarian Archetype can feel compassion, but they cannot stand weaklings and cowards who hide behind the shield of soft words, high titles or other people's power. Anyone who wants to command a Barbarian must prove her own fitness to lead through greater strength, wisdom or achievement. Personal honor also matters tremendously to this Archetype: Nothing offends a Barbarian more than a broken pledge. Latter-day Barbarians can be hard to recognize, but some bikers, gang members and urban tribalists exemplify this Archetype. So may some bluecollar workers, "rogue" cops and hard-boiled private eyes.

— Regain a point of Willpower whenever your raw force or uncompromising honor clearly triumphs over some overtly "civilized" opponent or situation.

The Bon Vivant exists for pleasure. This Archetype sees no deeper meaning to existence, and precious little joy either; therefore, the Bon Vivant says, "seize any pleasure you can, while you can, because that's all you have." Bon Vivants are not necessarily irresponsible, but they have little faith that any effort can bring an enduring reward. This Archetype holds special bitterness for low-Vitality ghosts, for whom life's pleasures have truly ended. Some ghosts, however, find ways to take their pleasures through Puppetry or various forms of manifestation. Hedonists, dilettantes and party animals are examples of this Archetype.

— Regain a point of Willpower when you enjoy yourself to the utmost in some novel way. Storytellers may even award multiple Willpower points for truly epic revelry, especially if other people find it the most wonderful experience of their existence.

Modifiers to Vitality: +3 Willpower: +0 Spite: +2

BRAVO

The Bravo likes to push other people around. He knows might doesn't make right, but it sure makes for fear and obedience, and that's what a Bravo wants. Many Bravos prefer intimidating their victims through physical violence, but some of them know how to hurt their victims socially, too. A teen queen who dominates her clique through the threat of snubs and expulsion can be just as much a Bravo as any robber, thug or bully. Bravos can feel pity or kindness; they just consider brutishness more useful. Some Bravos are actually insecure and use other people's fear to hide their own — even from themselves.

— Regain a point of Willpower whenever you gain your way through raw force or intimidation.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +1 Spite: +3

The Bumpkin believes in a practical approach and common sense. People with this Archetype distrust theory and ideology. They are the ones who bring a farranging discussion back to earth and look for solutions to problems instead of causes or blames. Unlike the Judge (q.v.) or Scientist (q.v.), the Bumpkin's rationality is grounded in life experience, and pretty chains of reasoning matter less than achieving results. Self-taught mechanics, shrewd country folk and sensible parents are good examples of this Archetype.

—Regain a point of Willpower when you cut through airy speculation or convoluted argument with a simple, practical solution.

Modifiers to Vitality: +2 Willpower: +2 Spite: +1

Rules exist for a reason and the Bureaucrat is determined to follow them. People with this Archetype care about proper procedures... sometimes more than earning results. Some Bureaucrat Archetypes are dull drones, but many of them sincerely believe that if people did not follow the rules and obey the proper authorities, the result would be deadly anarchy. Clerks and functionaries in all sorts of large organizations are examples of this Archetype.

— Regain a point of Willpower when you successfully resolve a crisis by following procedures set down by some established authority.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +3 Spite: +1

CAREGIVER

The Caregiver finds fulfillment in providing aid and comfort to others. Typical examples include nurses, doctors, social workers and community volunteers of all sorts, as well as loving parents. A Caregiver may help others physically, through food, money or services, but these are mere vehicles for the emotional succor they offer. Other people often come to Caregivers with

their problems because they know they will receive help, or at least a shoulder on which to cry. Ghosts with a Caregiver Nature often haunt their still-living friends or family and try to help them as their "guardian angel," or they carry tethers related to people they cared for in life.

—Regain a point of Willpower when you successfully protect or nurture someone else in an important way.

Modifiers to Vitality: +3 Willpower: +1 Spite: +1

CELEBRANT

Everyone has activities they enjoy, but the Celebrant turns one activity into an obsession. Lucky Celebrants can focus their enthusiasm into a job. Others must leave their favorite activity as a hobby. Given the chance, a Celebrant pursues her obsession as deeply as possible. Nearly any activity, from currency trading to building model spaceships, can serve as a Celebrant's obsession; players must select an enthusiasm for their Celebrant characters. This Archetype differs from the Fanatic (q.v.) in that the Celebrant pursues his interest for the fun of it rather than any sense of duty. Examples of this very broad Archetype range from social crusaders to hobby enthusiasts.

— Regain a point of Willpower any time you convert another person to your passion or pursue it in some remarkable way. Conversely, lose a point of temporary Willpower whenever you are denied your passion or it is badly lost to you.

Modifiers to Vitality: +3 Willpower: +0 Spite: +2 □

People with this Archetype need no help getting in touch with their inner child; they need help with their inner adult. The Child seeks someone to give him what he wants, preferably right now. No innocent, Child Archetypes are just immature brats in adult bodies. Actual children, mama's boys and daddy's little girls are examples of this Archetype, as well as some drug abusers, cult members or loyal minions of any sort. Alive or dead, the Child Archetype is an easy recruit for anyone who offers to care for him.

— Regain a point of Willpower when you convince someone to coddle you or cater to your demands for instant gratification, at no gain to themselves.

For this Archetype, everything is a contest and the Competitor means to win. People with this Archetype strive to be the best at what they do, from sports to stock brokerage. While Competitors are often deadly serious about achieving their rewards, the mere fact of winning is the greatest reward of all. Professional

athletes, go-getter executives and trial lawyers are examples of this Archetype.

— Regain a point of Willpower whenever you succeed at a test or challenge. The Storyteller may award more than one point of Willpower if the victory is especially difficult.

Modifiers to Vitality: +2 Willpower: +2 Spite: +1

The Conformist wants someone to follow. This does not necessarily make a Conformist cowardly or unimaginative; he simply wants someone else to supply a direction. These are the helpers, the supporters and implementers who work without complaint and accomplish their job. Examples of this Archetype include contented middle managers, groupies, party voters and all sorts of organization men and underlings.

— Regain a point of Willpower on occasions when the group or someone in the crucible achieves one of its goals due to your steadfast support.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +1 Spite: +3

CONNIVER

Thief, swindler and parasite are some of the milder terms used by those who encounter the Conniver. People with this Archetype look for the easy way, the fast buck, the scam to persuade someone else to do all the work. The Conniver feels no shame in tricking, cheating or outright robbing other people; he believes they would do the same to him if they could. Many Connivers are outright criminals, such as confidence tricksters or burglars. Other examples include men who sponge off gullible girlfriends, women looking for sugar daddies, mooching neighbors and all sorts of hucksters, from phony psychics to Internet spammers.

— Regain a point of Willpower whenever you trick someone into doing something for you.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +1 Spite: +3

The Critic finds purpose in revealing weaknesses and faults, whether in a plan, a work of art, an organization or a belief. People who follow this Archetype believe that a flaw cannot be repaired until someone points it out, and they accept this duty whether other people want their help or not. Social gadflies, art and literary critics, some academics and nosy Parker neighbors and relatives exemplify this Archetype.

 Regain a point of Willpower whenever you indicate a significant flaw that other people missed, which would have caused harm had you not detected it.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +2 Spite: +2

The Curmudgeon believes he's seen it all, and he doesn't like it. People with this Archetype go beyond skepticism to pessimism and fatalism. They take dour pleasure in pointing out the flaws and follies of everyone else, and in finding a cloud to cover every silver lining. Some people adopt a cynical stance because they think it's hip and cool not to believe in anything or anyone, but being a true Curmudgeon usually means a long lifetime's worth of personal disappointments and seeing people commit the same dumb mistakes over and over again. Examples of Curmudgeons include sharp-tongued oldsters, debunkers, cynical advertising personnel and political consultants.

—Regain a point of Willpower whenever someone does something stupid, just like you said they would. You must predict the failure or idiocy aloud or in a note you pass to the Storyteller. Be warned: If you predict failure whenever *anyone* attempts *anything*, in hopes of harvesting Willpower whenever something goes wrong, your Storyteller may start assessing Willpower penalties when other people succeed despite your predictions. If anything disheartens a Curmudgeon, it's being the stupid failure himself.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +2 Spite: +2

DABBLER

The Dabbler might be called a serial Celebrant (q.v.). She flits from idea to idea, passion to passion and project to project. Each enthusiasm consumes her for a while... but some new interest always beckons. Dabblers seldom finish anything, which infuriates people who catch their excitement and believe their promises. Some Dabblers change their favorite band or hobby; others change their job, religion or spouse.

 Regain a point of Willpower each time you find a new enthusiasm and drop your old one completely.

Modifiers to Vitality: +3 Willpower: +1 Spite: +1

DEFENDER

The Defender may work through warfare, law, medicine, politics, religion or other means, but folks with this Archetype always devote their existence to safeguarding someone or something else. A Defender may protect a person, a community, a location or an ideal. Typical examples of Defenders include cops, bodyguards, public-interest lawyers and activist clergy.

—Regain a point of Willpower when you successfully protect your charge from some hostile threat.

Modifiers to Vitality: +3 Willpower: +2 Spite: +0

The Deviant possesses strange appetites, ideas or habits that place her beyond the pale of conventional society. Unlike the Grotesque (q.v.), the true Deviant acts and thinks strangely, not to shock other people, but because she must. Some people show their deviance openly through their speech or dress; other people follow quieter compulsions through their bizarre opinions or take care to indulge their tastes in private. Conventional people often believe the Deviant insane or immoral, and some genuinely are, but many Deviants simply think and act according to standards uniquely their own. Extremists, crackpots, mental outpatients, sexual fetishists, eccentrics and outright weirdoes are Deviant Archetypes.

— Regain a point of Willpower whenever you can openly defy social mores without retribution, or when other people admit your bizarre ways were actually right in some circumstance.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +2 Spite: +2

DIRECTOR

Director Archetypes seek to take control and drive other people to complete useful tasks. Unlike the Autocrat (q.v.), the Director cares less for acknowledged power and more about results: People following this Archetype can guide with a soft touch, though with no less determination to see their will done. Directors also loathe disorder, and may consider efficiency and organization worthy goals in themselves. Coaches, teachers and leaders of impromptu or volunteer groups are examples of this Archetype.

— Regain a point of Willpower when you influence a group in completing a difficult task.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +3 Spite: +1

DREAMER

The Dreamer rejects the world as it is. Some people with this Archetype imagine "what could be" but lack a plan or the drive to implement their visions. Other Dreamers lose themselves in pure fantasy. Some Dreamers lose contact with reality and mistake imagination for how the world really works. Dreamers can change society, though, if they find someone to believe in their dreams or drive them to action. This is not always a good thing. Dreamer Archetypes may include artists, tinkerers and social critics as well as fans of science fiction, romance novels or other genre fiction. At another extreme,

however, they might be terrorists and other members of violent fringe groups.

— Regain a point of Willpower when other people show they value your imagination in some important way, like paying for it or changing their own course to follow your vision.

Modifiers to Vitality: +2 Willpower: +1 Spite: +2

EXPLORER

The Explorer loves discovering new, lost or obscure people, places and things, from a ruined temple in China to a great new African restaurant on the other side of town. For people with this Archetype, no joy can match the thrill of discovery. They despise the familiar and devote great effort in search of the unknown. Naturalists, archeologists, collectors and some enthusiasts can be examples of this Archetype.

— Regain a point of Willpower whenever you make a significant discovery.

Modifiers to Vitality: +3 Willpower: +1 Spite: +1

FANATIC

The Fanatic believes he serves a higher purpose. Fanatics act from a sense of duty — even a divine calling — rather than for amusement or any conventional reward. The transcendent importance of a Fanatic's goal justifies any means to that end, and anyone who will not help the Fanatic better move out of his way. Some Fanatics regard themselves as expendable for the cause, but many consider themselves utterly necessary. After all, so few people pursue their calling with the diligence it deserves. If a Fanatic feels guilt, it is for not spending more time and effort on his goal. Players of Fanatic Archetypes must choose a cause for their character to further. Revolutionaries and religious and political zealots are typical examples of Fanatics.

— Regain a point of Willpower whenever you accomplish a task that advances your cause in some important way.

Modifiers to Vitality: +2 Willpower: +2 Spite: +1

FOLLOWER

The Follower prefers not standing on her own. Instead, she attaches herself to people of power or status, hoping their success carries her along. A Follower may work at a patron's direction, but they prefer earning their way through bootlicking and flattery. Unlike the genuinely loyal Conformist (q.v.), the Follower attaches herself to individuals for what she can gain from them and she readily abandons them when more powerful or generous patrons come along. Sycophants, groupies and professional show-biz minions are examples of Follower Archetypes.



— Regain a point of Willpower when your toadying prompts a stronger person than yourself to defend you or reward you.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +1 Spite: +3

GAMBLER

To the Gambler, life is a game of chance. It isn't whether you win or lose, it's the thrill of uncertainty that draws people of this Archetype. Gamblers may place themselves in danger just for the thrill of escaping it. Unlike the Thrill-Seeker (q.v.), the Gambler relies more on luck than skill, though many people with this Archetype believe they have a way to "beat the odds." Daredevils, extreme-sports fanatics, stock traders and some folks in dangerous professions (like soldiers) may embody this Archetype.

— Regain a point of Willpower when you risk big and succeed, especially if you stacked the odds against yourself.

Modifiers to Vitality: +2 Willpower: +1 Spite: +2

GALLANT

A Gallant lives for the admiration of others. Gallant Archetypes strive to become the center of attention. They are always on stage, metaphorically speaking, with everyone around them playing their audience. Some Gallants have difficulty achieving long-term goals because they are too easily distracted by the lure of more immediate glory. Showoffs of all sorts exemplify Gallant Archetypes; more specific instances include actors, temperamental pro athletes and annoying drama queens.

— Regain a point of Willpower whenever you successfully dazzle another person. The Storyteller remains final arbiter of when you sufficiently impress someone, even (or especially) in the case of other players' characters.

Modifiers to Vitality: +2 Willpower: +2 Spite: +1

GROTESQUE

The Grotesque derives pleasure and a feeling of power from shocking other people, with a blush, gasp or angry expletive as her applause. As a twisted reflection of the Gallant (q.v.), people with this Archetype discover what upsets people and inflicts it on them. Nothing is too low for the Grotesque, from bodily noises to insulting someone's mother. Class clowns, shock radio hosts and gross-out comedians are examples of this Archetype.

— Regain a point of Willpower when your display completely outrages someone — or when your audience cheers and eggs you on.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +1 Spite: +3

JUDG€

Rational thought is the hallmark of the Judge. These people love analyzing the evidence and assembling a chain of logic that leads to a correct conclusion. Being right is of paramount importance to Judge Archetypes.

They often insert themselves into disputes — not to bring people together, as such (that's the Mediator's job), but to find the truth and persuade others to see reason. Judge Archetypes may feel impatience toward people and ideas they see as too "fanciful" or intuitive. Actual judges and lawyers may display this Archetype, as well as scientists, engineers, doctors and detectives.

— Regain a point of Willpower each time you reconcile dissenting parties through reason, or when you solve a mystery by assembling the available clues.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +2 Spite: +2

LEADER

The Leader forges disparate individuals into a united team. This Archetype differs from the Autocrat and Director (q.v.) in that the former Archetype focuses on power, the latter on results. The Leader lives for the moment when people come together for a common goal — under her guidance, if not her obvious authority. Military officers, coaches, community leaders and business team managers exemplify this Archetype.

— Regain a point of Willpower when your leadership enables your group to survive a crisis threatening to tear it apart, or to achieve a goal no individual member could achieve on their own.

Modifiers to Vitality: +2 Willpower: +2 Spite: +1

LONER

The Loner prefers his own company and may actively keep other people at a distance, at least in an emotional sense. This Archetype is about more than just isolation, though. Loner Archetypes seek independence and self-reliance; they do not want to depend on other people. Hermits, criminals, radicals and freethinkers exemplify this Archetype, but many Loners hold regular jobs while remaining almost unknown to their co-workers.

—Regain a point of Willpower when something you achieve by yourself nevertheless benefits your crucible in some way. The Storyteller may grant two Willpower points if your success is especially notable or in spite of strong opposition.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +2 Spite: +2

MARTYR

The Martyr sacrifices her own benefit for the sake of others. Some Martyrs exemplify the Archetype's name through grand acts of suffering in defense of a cause. Others make smaller and quieter sacrifices in hopes they can help another. Martyrs may exaggerate their suffering to win attention or sympathy, but many people who follow this Archetype sincerely believe that any present hardship serves some greater good. Such conviction gives a Martyr the strength to endure great suffering and adversity without complaint. Idealists, outcasts and poor but hard-working parents are Martyr Archetypes.

—Regain a point of Willpower whenever you endure some great sacrifice for another's gain or for the sake of your ideals.

Modifiers to Vitality: +2 Willpower: +2 Spite: +1

The Masochist takes a strange, backward pleasure in his own capacity to receive pain and abuse. Masochists enjoy humiliation, degradation, denial and physical suffering. Some examples of this Archetype use pain to test their mental and physical limits. Others take a perverse pleasure in submission or suffering, because at least it attracts attention... and some Masochists just don't know anything else but pain. Certain "extreme" athletes and urban tribalists may be of the Masochist Archetype; so may the clinically depressed or victims of prolonged abuse.

— Regain a point of Willpower when you suffer in some way you never have before or when you succeed *despite* great pain or personal discomfort.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +2 Spite: +2

MEDIATOR

The Mediator enjoys bringing folks together. People with this Archetype serve as go-betweens, negotiators and facilitators. They try resolving disputes and building alliances, and they can easily see multiple points of view. Unlike the Judge (q.v.), a Mediator does not particularly care about truth, only about agreement. Agents, diplomats, contract lawyers and some politicians are Mediator Archetypes.

— Regain a point of Willpower when you bring a negotiation to a conclusion that satisfies both sides.

Modifiers to Vitality: +2 Willpower: +1 Spite: +2

MENTOR

The Mentor teaches through experience and example. Unlike the wordy Pedagogue (q.v.), the Mentor imparts knowledge through actions. People with this Archetype guide (or push) people into situations where they can learn a lesson, whether it's helping a doctoral candidate complete her thesis or giving Junior his first hangover so he knows what it's like. Mentors consider blunders and pain suitable teaching tools: When the student falls once, he pays better attention next time. Teachers, big brothers and sisters, and tradesmen who take on apprentices and interns may be Mentor Archetypes.

— Regain a point of Willpower when someone "learns by doing" under your guidance.

Modifiers to Vitality: +3 Willpower: +1 Spite: +1

The Monster knows he is evil and accepts it. People with this Archetype might not actually espouse an "Evil, be thou my Good" philosophy, but that's certainly the

impression their victims receive. The Monster may loathe himself or revel in his malevolence — or both — but he cannot resist his nastier compulsions. Rare Monsters try finding some "greater good" in their evil by serving as a warning to others. Spectres, criminals and extremely disturbed (and disturbing) mortals can exemplify the Monster Archetype.

— Monster characters should pick one favored sort of malignant deed. They regain Willpower when they indulge that urge. For instance, a vandal earns back Willpower through wanton destruction, while an apostate regains Willpower by leading another person to doubt her faith. Pick a destiny and fulfill it.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +2 Spite: +2

PEDAGOGUE

The Pedagogue knows it all and wants you to know it too. Pedagogue Archetypes readily share their knowledge, often at great length. Some Pedagogues are enthusiasts vocal about their interests; others feel a mission to help others through expertise; and some are just blowhards and intellectual showoffs. Teachers, librarians, "experts in their field," the overeducated and general know-it-alls exemplify this Archetype.

— Regain a point of Willpower when another person benefits from what they learned from you. You need to know how they benefited.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +2 Spite: +2

PENITENT

The Penitent believes she has done wrong and means to atone for it. Some Penitents are consumed with guilt for genuinely terrible deeds, but this is not actually necessary for this Archetype. Everyone harms other people in little ways, or at least fails to help now and then, but the Penitent feels a greater sense of responsibility. Some Penitents believe their very existence a sin for which they must atone. Whatever the reason, people with this Archetype expend great effort recompensing the universe for their shortcomings. Despite the Archetype's religious connotations, however, actual religious belief is not necessary. Reformed criminals, charity workers, people with low self-esteem, some extremely religious folks and "unquiet spirits doomed to walk the earth" are typical Penitent Archetypes.

— Regain a point of Willpower when you feel you have fully done penance for a given grievance. The redemption should be of the same magnitude as the offense — the greater the transgression, the greater the atonement. The Storyteller acts as final arbiter in judging adequate acts of reparation.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +3 Spite: +1

PERFECTIONIST

A job worth doing is a job worth doing perfectly, and the Perfectionist accepts nothing less. A Perfectionist Archetype spends long hours detailing her plans and is not satisfied unless they are executed flawlessly. People who follow this Archetype expect the same commitment and attention to detail from other people, too (often aggravating them in the process). Perfectionists run the risk of never achieving much because of their obsessive need to work out every little detail. Theatrical directors, computer programmers, Olympic trainers and some particularly obsessive hobbyists are all Perfectionist Archetypes.

— Regain a point of Willpower when you achieve a goal without any demonstrable flaw or impediment.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +3 Spite: +1

RAHE

Every society sets limits on what people may do for fun. The Rake enjoys defying those limits. Public intoxication, illicit or deviant sex and petty (or not so petty) crime give the Rake a special rush. Unlike the Bon Vivant (q.v.), the Rake specifically seeks the forbidden; unlike the Rebel (q.v.), he sees no higher purpose in challenging social boundaries. The Rake also cares less about an audience than does the Grotesque (q.v.). Naughty children, delinquent teenagers and controversial celebrities exemplify this Archetype.

— Regain a point of Willpower when a "forbidden" or "disgraceful" act leads to pleasure and you escape the social consequences... at least for now.

Modifiers to Vitality: +2 Willpower: +1 Spite: +2

REBEL

The Rebel hates authority and feels a need to challenge and undermine it. Some Rebel Archetypes sincerely believe they oppose a social evil, but most are driven (consciously or not) by some personal grievance against an authority figure. Teenagers, political radicals, some criminals and deliberate nonconformists may all be Rebel Archetypes.

— Regain a point of Willpower when your actions significantly damage your chosen opponent or lead others to doubt or reject it as well. The player should choose the person, institution or idea that her character rebels against.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +2 Spite: +2

RIDDLER

The Riddler wraps himself in mystery. People of this Archetype love to baffle, mislead and confuse the folks around them for the sense of intellectual superiority that it brings. Riddlers may enjoy penetrating someone else's secrets, but their greatest fear is that anyone will uncover

the truth about them. Deep-cover agents and intellectual poseurs may exemplify this Archetype.

— Regain one Willpower when you manage to confuse or mislead another person.

Modifiers to Vitality: +2 Willpower: +2 Spite: +1

ROGUE

The Rogue sees himself as a lone wolf in a world of sheep. No one matters to a Rogue Archetype but himself. Rogues pride themselves on their self-sufficiency and view dependence on others as a weakness. This Archetype has aspects in common with the Loner (q.v.) and Conniver (q.v.). The Loner, however, would see exploiting others as a form of dependence, while the Conniver needs other people for his social manipulations. A Rogue can simply take the money and run, with never a backward glance. Many sorts of criminals embody the Rogue Archetype, as well as slum-dwellers, smugglers and the more ruthless sort of capitalist.

—Regain a point of Willpower when you profit from your selfishness, whether materially or otherwise. The Storyteller may award two Willpower points if you acquire your gain without exposing your selfishness or any weakness.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +2 Spite: +2

SCIENTIST

To the Scientist, existence is a puzzle to solve. People with this Archetype methodically examine every situation in search of logical explanations and general rules they can apply elsewhere. This is not to say a Scientist Archetype always seeks a scientific explanation. People with this Archetype can try to quantify the world into systems that seem completely insane to anyone who does not accept their peculiar reasoning. Actual scientists often have this Archetype, but so do conspiracy theorists and scholarly occultists.

— Regain a point of Willpower whenever your logical, systematic investigation enables you to solve a problem, or a theory you developed in the course of one inquiry proves useful in another, similar situation.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +3 Spite: +1

SOCIALITE

The Socialite might not live by wit and charm, but she certainly lives for them. The social graces become an art form for people with this Archetype, by which they make other people happy and keep the peace. Whether at a formal-dress ball or a bull session around the office water cooler, the Socialite's charm and subtle diplomacy encourages people to calm down, relax and enjoy themselves. Whether this light manipulation also leads to behind-the-scenes influence or not is up to the character. Heads of high-society families,

libertines, popular kids and diplomats are examples of this Archetype.

— Regain a point of Willpower when you deflate a volatile situation and return a gathering to peace and harmony.

Modifiers to Vitality: +2 Willpower: +2 Spite: +1

SURVIVOR

The Survivor won't give up. Regardless of the adversity or how great the odds, people with this Archetype refuse to surrender. When strength, smarts, guile and connections fail, Survivor Archetypes often pull through on sheer determination. Survivors are often frustrated by others' acceptance of "what fate has in store" or achieving less than they could. Outcasts, street folk and idealists may well be Survivor Archetypes.

— Regain a point of Willpower when you survive a threatening situation through tenacity, or when your counsel and example lead another person to persist despite adversity.

Modifiers to Vitality: +2 Willpower: +2 Spite: +1

THRILL-SEEHER

The Thrill-Seeker lives for the rush brought on by danger. Unlike those of arguably saner disposition, the Thrill-Seeker thinks risking injury and death is fun. Thrill-Seekers are not actually suicidal; they just love the adrenaline rush of testing their skills under pressure. "Extreme" athletes, exhibitionists and some criminals or soldiers may all embody the Thrill-Seeker Archetype.

—Regain a point of Willpower when you knowingly undertake a dangerous task and succeed at it. "Thrill-seeker" does not mean "stupid" or "suicidal," though: The Storyteller can choose not to reward a player who gratuitously sends her character into pointless peril for the sole purpose of regaining Willpower.

Modifiers to Vitality: +3 Willpower: +0 Spite: +2

TRADITIONALIST

The Traditionalist takes comfort in the tried and true. People with this Archetype would argue that the status quo exists because it works, and novelty means unnecessary risks. They differ from the Bureaucrat (q.v.) in that Traditionalists value the old and familiar, while Bureaucrats value procedure for its own sake. A skeptic might note that Traditionalists often hold comfortable and secure positions in the systems they defend, but that does not make them less sincere. Conservatives, authority figures, judges and low-level politicians are often examples of this Archetype.

—Regain a point of Willpower when you successfully resist an attempt at "change for the sake of change." You also regain a point of Willpower when sticking to old, proven ways turns out to be the best.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +2 Spite: +2

TRICHSTER

No matter how grim a situation becomes, the Trickster can find a bit of humor in it. Tricksters abhor sorrow and pain, so they try lightening the mood with a joke. Although many Tricksters use comedy to hide their own misery, some people with this Archetype use laughter as a weapon to point out folly and injustice. Comedians, satirists, cartoonists and class clowns often fall into the Trickster Archetype.

— Regain a point of Willpower when your humor lifts the spirits of other people, especially if you can forget your own pain in the process.

Modifiers to Vitality: +2 Willpower: +2 Spite: +1 VISIO미유유막

The Visionary looks beyond present realities to see amazing possibilities. Unlike the idle Dreamer (q.v.), the Visionary believes her imagination can become reality if enough people work to accomplish it. Thus, people with this Archetype often challenge social conventions and criticize the tried and true. Even the most progressive society feels some discomfort with the Visionaries who drive change; in traditional cultures, Visionaries may face actual threats to their existence. Philosophers, scientists, inventors, social reformers and some science fiction writers often are Visionary Archetypes.

— Regain a point of Willpower whenever you convince other people to have faith in your dreams and follow the course of action suggested by your vision.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +3 Spite: +1 WRETCH

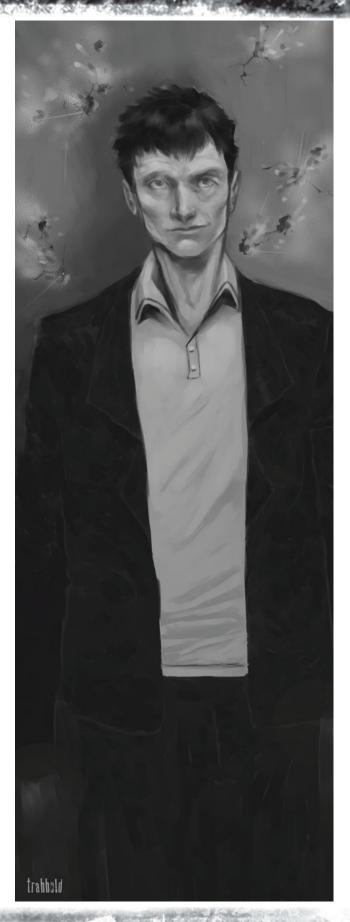
The Wretch despises himself and assumes everyone else does too. People with this Archetype experience so much rejection they come to expect it. Sometimes the Wretch seeks pity and aid from others, but it's never enough. Sometimes a Wretch seeks to punish those who show him compassion, due to a mix of suspicion and bitterness at past betrayals of his trust. Whiners, passive-aggressive neurotics, victims of abuse and "slaves" or "pets" (extreme submissives in sexual contexts) can be examples of Wretch Archetypes.

— Regain a point of Willpower when others vilify you as worthless or despair of ever reaching you.

Modifiers to Vitality: +1 Willpower: +1 Spite: +3

ATTRIBUTES

These Traits describe the basic strengths and weaknesses of characters, apart from any training, social connections or possessions. Every living and ghostly creature has Physical, Mental and Social Attributes. These Traits are charted on a scale of one to five dots. Most people receive ratings from one (poor) to three (good, but nothing special) in their Attributes. People with Attributes rated from four (excellent) to five (a



mortal paragon of that Trait) are clearly extraordinary. No human or ghost has a natural Attribute score above five, but certain Horrors may allow users to exceed this limitation for short periods.

Some players may wonder how ghosts and projected entities can have certain Traits, especially physical ones, without bodies. It may also seem strange that a character's Attributes remain the same in or out of his body. How can a ghost exert Strength without muscles? Why shouldn't a person with a slow and awkward body become quick and agile out of it? If a ghost's body is a figment of her imagination, why shouldn't characters manifest whatever bodies they want?

One answer lies in habit. Take Strength as an example. For corporeal creatures, Strength comes from muscular bulk and conditioning. Ghosts and projected entities don't have muscles, but they possess a memory of them, and that memory determines how much force they can exert against the physical world (when materialized) or against each other. Dexterity and Stamina work the same way: A clumsy person knows he cannot do backflips, and a sickly person expects to tire quickly.

Keeping a projector's Attributes the same in or out of his body also keeps the game simpler. Players have enough to keep track of already. If you want to make your character less competent than her Attributes suggest when she's in her body, just for the roleplaying challenge, good for you.

Some powers do allow characters to alter their Attributes, or at least achieve a similar result. Such powers require that a ghost or projector expend some of his psychic force and the effects last only a short time. See Chapter Two for descriptions of the various Horrors.

PHYSICAL

Physical Attributes represent the capacities of a character's body. The Strength Trait measures a character's muscular power; Dexterity, her speed, agility and precision of movement; and Stamina, her toughness and endurance. Ghosts and projected entities don't have a corporeal body, but they imagine they do and that's enough to give them Physical Traits.

STRENGTH

"DON'T TOUCH ME!" The blip reared upright and away from Hoyt's sympathetic hand on his shoulder. The ghostly young man was... taller than Hoyt expected. The blip's fists smashed down against the Haunter's own projected form. "DIRTY! DIRTY! BAD TOUCH!"

For all his fury, the ghost didn't know the first thing about fighting. Hoyt easily caught the blip's wrists. "Whoa, ease up buddy," Hoyt said.

Suddenly, the blip had his own hands on Hoyt's wrists

and the Haunter found himself hurled across the room and through the wall. As the blip leaped through the wall after him, Hoyt realized that talking to the blip might be harder than he'd expected.

This Trait measures a character's capacity to apply physical force. Characters use Strength to lift and carry loads, push or pull heavy objects, jump, climb or break things. Strength also adds to a character's damage dice pool for hand-to-hand combat.

Specialties: Iron Grip, Heavy Lifting, Unstoppable, Wiry, Massive, Reserves of Strength, Strong Back, Bodybuilder Physique, Piledriver Fists

- Poor: You can lift 40 lbs. Child or feeble oldster.
- • Average: You can lift 100 lbs. Normal adult.
- ••• Good: You can lift 250 lbs. Trained (or self-trained) athlete.
- •••• Exceptional: You can lift 400 lbs. NFL linebacker.
- •••• Outstanding: You can lift 650 lbs. Olympian weight lifter.

DEXTERITY

The butcher knife whizzed past Ethan's ear. The crippled young man threw himself sideways to avoid it, and his wheelchair toppled over. As the mystery poltergeist whirled the knife around for another pass, Zoë spun out silver threads to snatch a brass tray from the coffee table. Ethan dragged himself behind the couch while Zoë blocked the knife with the tray — parrying the blade in a series of hollow metal pangs. But the other Poltergeist was fast, so very fast.... Zoë knew if she did not find a way to stop him soon, the knife would slip past her defense and Ethan would die.

This Attribute combines speed, reflexes, reaction time, precision and coordination of movement. A circus acrobat, a skilled pickpocket, a karate master and a target-shooting champion all show aspects of a high Dexterity. This Trait measures how well you direct things to go where you want, whether it's doing a back-flip, picking a lock or sending the eight-ball into the corner pocket. Most forms of physical combat use Dexterity in the dice pools for attacking or dodging.

Ghosts and projectors no longer suffer the limits of flesh, but habit can be very strong. Dexterity comes from training as well as any physical property of nerves and muscles. A person with a high Dexterity doesn't need to stop and think what to do; he's practiced enough to dodge a punch, throw a grenade on target or thread a needle by reflex. That mental Dexterity stays the same whether a character has a physical body or not.

Specialties: Lightning Reflexes, Perfect Balance, Swift, Graceful, Nimble, Steady Hand, Athletic, Sure-Footed, Lithe, Flexible

Poor: You are clumsy and awkward, all thumbs, two left feet and slow besides.

- • Average: You're no gymnast, but you can get around okay.
- ••• Good: You have some real athletic potential.
- •••• Exceptional: Juggling knives? No problem.
- •••• Outstanding: You are a world-class gymnast, and any other type of athlete you want.

STAMINA

"Don't let me fall," Marilee whimpered. "Please don't let me fall."

"I won't," Craig said, gritting his teeth. Marilee was not a large woman, but lying on the roof as he was, Craig didn't have the proper leverage to pull her up. It was a long way down to the pavement, where, the materialized hue saw, people pointed up at them.

His hands ached where they gripped Marilee's wrists, spectral memories of pain and fatigue hindering his rescue efforts. Could he hold her long enough for help to arrive?

I have to, he thought. I have to. Nobody dies on my watch.

This Trait measures a character's health, endurance and toughness. A character with a high Stamina can exert herself for long periods, endure cold, hunger, lack of sleep and other privations, and withstand more physical damage before suffering impairment. People with low Stamina tire quickly and become sick easily. A low Stamina can also represent asthma or some other chronic medical condition that weakens a character. Stamina has a psychological component as well: A strong, young person may nevertheless lack the grit and determination to endure — or survive — while the proverbial tough old bird keeps going. As with other Physical Traits, habit and this mental aspect give projectors and ghosts the same Stamina as when they had bodies.

Specialties: Tireless, Tough as Nails, Resolute, Dedicated, Stalwart, Healthy, Resilient, Pain Resistant

- Poor: You are sickly, fragile and tire after mere moments of mild exertion.
- • Average: You are moderately healthy, can run a mile if you must, and can take a punch or two.
- ••• Good: You can jog for miles and play with pain.
- •••• Exceptional: You could survive in the Arctic or the Sahara, at least for a while. Sick days are for other people.
- ••••• Outstanding: As a captured Resistance fighter, Jacques Cousteau endured years of Nazi torture without breaking. So could you.

SOCIAL

Social Attributes represent a character's ability to interact with other people. In this, very little separates ghosts, projectors and mortals. These Traits are vital both in giving a good first impression and in building

a longer-term relationship. Charisma indicates a character's general forcefulness and compelling presence; Manipulation, his skill at influencing other people; and Appearance, his looks and manners. Together, Social Attributes tell a great deal about a character's personality.

CHARISMA

"Of course, sir," the Assistant Director said. "We'd be glad to let you speak with the entire operation squad. I'm sure they can answer all your concerns about the process." He pressed the buzzer on his desk and said, "Helena, could you send in Mr. Carruthers?" He turned back to the client. "I'm afraid it may take a while to collect the other team members — days off, training sessions, you know. Why don't you use my office while I hunt them down?"

Five minutes later, he peeked into his office. The affable Carruthers and the client were chatting and laughing like old friends. The Assistant Director smiled. This contract would be easy.

Charisma represents a person's raw force of personality — a combination of bearing, charm and confidence that inspires respect in other people. Characters with a high Charisma seem to fill more space than their actual body. They seem more *there* than other characters, and people respond positively to this "star power." People generally like and trust characters with a high Charisma, even if they know they shouldn't. Conversely, people often discount or ignore characters with a low Charisma, no matter how excellent their virtues, how brilliant their thoughts or how much danger they actually present.

This Trait also includes a character's sense of self and resistance to emotional influence by others. People with high Charisma tend to resist social pressure. They are more used to people deferring to them than the other way around. Thus, characters often use a Charisma-based dice pool to resist Manipulation-based dice pools.

Specialties: Smooth Talker, Urbane, Likeable, Witty, Eloquent, Charming, Commanding, Regal, Sex Appeal, Rustic, Well-Mannered, Outgoing, Sophisticated, Fun Company

- Poor: Nice people ignore you. Most people actively avoid you. You're used to casual snubs and insults.
- •• Average: You have some friends. Most people find you acceptable company in an elevator.
- • Good: You make friends easily. People like, trust and respect you.
- •••• Exceptional: Your personal magnetism draws everyone to you.
- Outstanding: You could lead a nation into a war, or out of it. Starting a religion is not beyond your abilities.

TRAIT SPECIALTIES

Most Traits encompass many specialized aptitudes; characters can be better at some applications of Traits and worse at others. For instance, one character can have a high Dexterity because she has an exceptionally steady hand, or because she's a trained athlete; another character's high Intelligence could represent extensive education or an analytical mind. In the same spirit, a soldier might train at sniping, a con man might develop special skills at sob stories or a singer might be famous for his vocal endurance.

If a character has a score of 4 or higher in an Attribute or Ability, the player may choose a *specialty* to represent such narrower fields of greater expertise. For instance, a marathon runner could have Stamina 4, with the specialty "Tireless." Another character could have Stamina 4 with the specialty "Healthy as a Horse" to represent exceptional resistance to disease. Specialties help make characters more distinctive.

Specialties also have a rules effect. Whenever a player rolls dice involving a Trait's specialty, she has a chance to gain extra successes. The player counts the successes normally, then takes each die that rolled a "10" and re-rolls it at the same difficulty. The player adds any new successes to the total. If any of these re-rolled dice come up "10," the player can roll them yet again. The process continues until the player rolls no more "10s."

What if a dice pool involves *two* Traits with specialties? Storytellers should examine such cases closely, to ensure the action really does encompass both specialties. If that's the case, the player can reroll both "9s" and "10s" to accumulate more successes.

Example: John Carruthers, a Wisp and prestidigitator, has Subterfuge 4 with the specialty "Sleight of Hand."

He needs to steal a key card from a security guard so he can raid the Astrotronics offices (as a ghost he can walk through walls, but he can't carry stuff out with him). John says, "Ick! Is that a spider on you?" and swats at the recoiling guard's shoulder with one hand — releasing the dead spider he'd palmed — while his other hand pulls the key card from the guard's pocket. To see how well this bit of legerdemain works, the Storyteller tells John's player, Matt, to roll John's Dexterity (4) + Subterfuge (4) versus difficulty 6. The dice pool is 8. Matt scores two successes, but one of them is a "10." Matt takes the "10" die and rolls it again, scoring another success with a 6. Matt cannot roll for further successes because he did not roll "10" again, but three successes are enough for the task at hand. Carruthers pockets the card, and the guard doesn't realize he took it.

Later, John tries using magic tricks to befriend a child who has withdrawn almost to catatonia from the trauma of spontaneously channeling Spectres. John has a Charisma of 4 with a specialty of "Likeable." The Storyteller agrees that trying to gain trust and friendship using magic tricks results in a Charisma + Subterfuge dice pool; both of John's specialties apply, but the Storyteller sets the difficulty at 8 — this psychically brutalized child is a tough audience. Once more, Matt has a dice pool of 8. He rolls three successes: an 8, 9 and 10! Since both the Attribute and Ability in the dice pool carried specialties, Matt re-rolls both the "9" die and the "10" die. He gets lucky with a 4 and a 9, adding one more success. Matt rolls the "9" die again and fails with a 6, but still accumulates four successes. Soon the child is cuddled in John's arms, sobbing out her terrible visions... and then asks the Wisp, trust replacing the tears in her eyes, if the magician can protect her from the monsters invading her mind. Sometimes you can succeed too well!

MANIPULATION

Chet watched the Fabroni meeting with boredom until the consigliere brought up the matter of the Green Tiger gang and the resulting problems with their activities. The tong sponsoring the Green Tigers, however, said the gang had gone rogue and would let the Fabronis wipe them out. The projector's moment had arrived. He clutched the consigliere's windpipe in his intangible fist and his words came out of the mob counselor's mouth, with just a hint of a sneer: "Assuming you believe the chinks and it isn't a trap." Chet leaned against the wall while the mobsters exploded into argument.

Honor among thieves, hah. It didn't take much to plant the seeds of suspicion.

This Trait measures how well a character can alter the beliefs and emotions of other people. Characters use Manipulation to trick, bluff, fast-talk and railroad other characters, or to convince them despite logic or their better judgment. A person can manipulate by knowing what a person wants to hear, the right tone of voice, the body language to affect and which social codes to follow. Manipulation may involve guilt trips, flattery, feigned concern, specious logic or any other stratagem to pull someone else's strings. Just as importantly, characters use Manipulation to hide their true feelings from others. Manipulation usually involves a conscious effort, though some people almost reflexively play on the emotions of others.

Unlike Charisma, Manipulation does not imply that other people like you. You can manipulate people who despise you (though it may be difficult). This Trait also differs from Charisma in the consequences for failure. A failed Manipulation-based dice roll usually means the target saw through the attempt to snow him... and he's probably angry about it. A botched Manipulation roll can turn a person into a character's permanent enemy. While highly charismatic characters tend to accumulate friends, the people closest to skilled manipulators often distrust them — they don't want to be fooled again. On the other hand, a person successfully and repeatedly manipulated may resist any attempt to show him how another character used him.

Specialties: Persuasive, Cunning, Dissembling, Silver-Tongued, Double-Talk, Bravado, Bluster, Glib, Ingratiating, Sophist, Witty, Seductive, Guilt-Trips

- Poor: You express yourself badly. When you tell the truth, people don't believe you and when you lie, everyone knows it.
- • Average: You can fool or persuade some of the people some of the time, just like everyone else.
- • Good: Now and then you talk people into ignoring their better judgment.
- •••• Exceptional: You could become a good politician or a bad one, and get away with it.
- •••• Outstanding: Everyone's a puppet, dancing to your will.

APPEARANCE

"Do I have to?" Hoyt asked for the third time.

"Yes," Kate said yet again. "This is our best chance to get close to van Sinz. If I can wear this goddamn gown, you can wear a tuxedo for one evening. It can't be worse than inhabiting that old junker last week."

"That was a car," Hoyt said, protesting the difference. "I know cars. I don't know society parties or tuxedoes!"

"Leave it to us," the tailor said, drawing Hoyt away from Kate. "We'll have you looking like a million bucks."

An hour later, the two men returned. The clothier simultaneously looked pleased and ready to spit nails. Hoyt looked... almost unrecognizable in the tailored black suit, with his hair moussed into a wave. Kate kept her face severe, but she thought, Damn, he cleans up nice.

This Trait measures a character's personal attractiveness. It combines the look of a character's face and body with subtler aspects of grace, poise and presentation. A blank, vapid expression or poor hygiene can spoil a pretty face, while homelier features can become attractive through their animation and the personality that shines through. The most handsome men and beautiful women combine looks and expression in one package. How a character speaks and dresses may also contribute to this Trait.

Appearance governs first impressions. Looks matter regardless what people say, and attractive people receive more attention and a better reception than plainer folk do. To represent this, Storytellers may rule that when one character first encounters another, her Social dice pools cannot exceed her Appearance score, unless the Social Attribute in the pool is Appearance itself. Later, once the characters learn more about the various nuances of beauty, they can use their full Charisma or Manipulation to build on that first impression — or counteract it. Characters with a high Appearance should not seek too much at once, however. People are rarely so infatuated with a character's good looks that they agree to share their bank account, pass on company secrets, cover up a murder or engage in other felonies.

Beauty is not always a benefit, though. Some people may envy and resent a character with a high Appearance. In such cases, a character may need to persevere to prove (through other Attributes) that he or she is more than just another pretty face or a great body.

Specialties: Alluring, Handsome, Zoftig, Bold Demeanor, Rugged, Expressive, Snappy Dresser, Honest Face, Winning Smile, Look of Eagles, Nice Ass, Melodious Voice

- Poor: Ugly, whether from your face, your body or your manners.
- • Average: People don't look twice at you, for better or worse.
- Good: You have a pleasant appearance and may receive small favors for it.
- •••• Exceptional: People go out of their way to look at you and win your favor. You can live off your looks as a model or by working in the more disreputable professions.
- •••• Outstanding: Your stunning good looks inspire awe, jealousy, lust and traffic accidents.

MENTAL

Of all the Attributes, not having a body affects the Mental Traits least. These three Attributes define a character's ability to gather and use information. Through Perception, a character learns about the world, people and events around her; through Intelligence, she analyzes, interprets and plans her actions; and through Wits, he reacts quickly to new circumstances, rapid changes and stressful situations.

PERCEPTION

As Chet Mason crossed the Orpheus grounds, his attention drifted to one of the manicured shrubs gracing the business park, about 500 feet away. His heart pounded and his breath caught. The jungle closed around him as he dove behind a tree.

"Get hold of yourself, soldier!" he told himself a moment later. "No snipers here." Mason didn't continue his rounds, though. He made the painful walk to the distant shrub and poked it with his cane. In less than a minute he found the shotgun microphone hidden in the foliage. He'd seen the light glinting off its barrel.

This Trait measures a character's capacity to observe his surroundings and recognize important details. A person can consciously try to perceive some clue or shade of meaning, like looking for a particular face in a crowd or guessing how two people really feel about each other from the tone of their conversation. At least as often, however, Perception works unconsciously, as when a character spots an ambush or notices that a new acquaintance's class ring bears the symbol of an ancient cult.

Perception involves both a person's sensory equipment and his habits of thought and attentiveness. A low Perception score could represent bad eyesight or hearing, a character who tends to woolgather or who just doesn't pay attention. Truly high Perception ratings indicate a character accustomed to noticing and remembering every nuance and detail of his surroundings.

Specialties: Alert, Insightful, Careful, Experienced, Subtle Clues, Probing, Intuitive, Social Nuances, Keen-Eyed, Perfect Pitch, Discerning Smell, Sensitive Touch

- Poor: You don't pay much attention to your surroundings, whether from distraction, selfabsorption, sunny unconcern or impaired senses.
- • Average: You avoid most life-threatening dangers and discern the big picture, but details often slip past you.
- ••• Good: You perceive some subtleties and details of life and other people.
- •••• Exceptional: You have a detective's eye, or an artist's, for the nuances around you.
- • • Outstanding: You instantly spot even the tiniest surrounding details.

INTELLIGENCE

"Oh, don't worry," Kate said to Jason. "I explained to Monica that you couldn't have murdered her, even though she thought she saw you in the mirror. But you, Mark...." Kate turned to the short, dark-haired man. "Once I heard the terms of the trust fund for you and Monica, it all became clear. You had a key to your sister's apartment. I found the wig and the sweater."

Mark turned pale. Lieutenant Gale's hand crept to his gun.

"Arrest him quickly, Lieutenant. Monica's been here the whole time and she wants a word with her brother."

This Trait measures a character's mental processing power. It combines memory, knowledge, reasoning, flexibility and capacity to learn. In general, a character with a high Intelligence knows a lot (though maybe not from a formal education) and knows how to use it. The

Trait may have many shades of meaning, though. An intelligent character could lack a capacity for original thought, but possess a great memory for facts and other people's ideas. A high Intelligence may also represent a creative visionary or an astute reasoner who doesn't know much, but uses everything he knows.

Conversely, a low Intelligence rating does not necessarily make a character stupid. It could reflect ignorance or limited experience of the world, such as a child or a person who grew up on the streets without formal tutoring. This Trait does *not* include wisdom, good sense or street savvy: A character's personality and Nature reflect those qualities. Intelligence does not necessarily indicate a quick thinker, either (Wits covers that aspect of a character's mind).

Specialties: Knowledgeable, Astute, Bookworm, Analytical, Creative, Discerning, Problem Solver, Subject Authority, Thorough, Good Memory, Focused

- Poor: IQ 80. You live in ignorance and incomprehension.
- • Average: IQ 100. You're no dummy, but deep thought is not for you.
- ••• Good: IQ 120. Pretty smart, with a good memory and capacity for reason.
- •••• Exceptional: IQ 140. Deep thought is for you.
- •••• Outstanding: IQ 160+. Certified genius. What you don't know you easily figure out on your own.

WITS

Zoë realized she was trapped; she couldn't possibly escape. Bergelmir's goons would reach her in seconds. The poltergeist leaped from the ruined car and brandished the shimmering jade mask. "You want this? You can swim for it!" Zoë said, hurling it over the side of the bridge. Bergelmir caught her arms — a second too late — then threw her to the ground. He turned to watch the tiny green speck splash into the water far below.

"You know I'll hire divers," he said. He marched back to his car while his gunmen kept wary eyes on Zoë. Their van joined the trickle of vehicles pulling past her car.

When the police finally made it through the traffic jam, they found Zoë's car, but the projector was gone. She and the Mayan mask rode, unseen and unnoticed, in the back of a pickup that had been caught in the traffic jam. Zoë wondered how long Bergelmir would search before he realized the "mask" she'd thrown was nothing but a map guidebook momentarily congealed with plasm....

The Wits Trait measures a character's ability to think on her feet and react quickly — and with luck, correctly — to sudden changes. A character can be very intelligent, but a plodding thinker; a character with high Wits can think around corners to see novel solutions to immediate problems. Characters with a low Wits rating may be gullible, unsophisticated, mentally

lazy or just slow. They also tend to fluster easily under stress. In contrast, characters with high Wits can arrive at workable plans quickly and keep their cool. The Trait helps characters recognize deception... that "something doesn't add up here." Wits also has a social aspect, which enables characters to avoid social pitfalls or recover from them quickly — spotting an attempt at humiliation, for instance, or topping an insult with a better one right back.

Specialties: Ambushes, Changes in Strategy, Snappy Comebacks, Ever-Ready, Intuitive, Combat Reflexes, Level-Headed, Creative, Shrewd, Wily, Sharp

- Poor: Huh?
- • Average: You're not too easy a mark.
- ••• Good: You react quickly and are seldom flustered or at a loss for words.
- •••• Exceptional: Your snappy comebacks make jaws drop.
- •••• Outstanding: You react to events almost before they happen, and take everything in stride.

ABILITIES

Whereas Attributes are the inborn qualities shared by all characters, Abilities are learned and developed traits that show what a given individual *accomplished* with his share of those qualities. Many people are strong and quick, for example, but only those who trained their muscles and reflexes properly can fight well or walk a tightrope. The same goes for trades and assimilated data; the highest IQ in the world won't help a soul who simply doesn't know the answer to the question at hand. It is his accompanying Ability scores that make his high Intelligence such an asset. As in real life, success is about winning combinations.

Each Ability covers a broad range of either activities or comprehension, and each is assigned to one of three sub-categories: Talents, Skills or Knowledges. While the 36 Abilities offered herein are not the only ones available to characters, they are considered the primary set and most rolls can and will involve one or another. Players can also acquire a specialty (see p.163) in any Ability they possess, even if its rating is not yet 4 or higher. This reflects the fact that many opt to learn specific aspects of skills and fields, rather than just pursuing general knowledge.

TALENTS

Some types of Abilities are not easily learned, but are instead more like inborn proclivities (similar to focused and specialized Attributes). These traits, called Talents, are intuited more often than not, and the only true way to improve and explore them is through experience and practice. Books on the subjects of specific Talents might be informative, but they don't come close to actually instructing anyone in how to use them. The expression, "It's an art, not a science"



ZERO ATTRIBUTE SCORES

Attribute scores of zero seldom occur naturally. Storytellers can use a zero Attribute rating to represent terrible debilities from sickness, wounds, drugs or extreme old age. A character with a zero score in any Ability may well be completely incapacitated.

Some players may ask to "sell off" a character's free dot in an Attribute as a way to gain more character points. Sorry, you can't do this. Buying Traits is strictly a one-way process. Zero Attribute ratings generally mean that something bad has happened to a character.

Strength zero means a character is so weak, he has trouble moving his own body.

Dexterity zero indicates anything from paralysis to a serious palsy that renders fine motor control impossible. You need a walker to stand upright.

Stamina zero represents life-threatening illness. A character with Stamina zero needs hospital care just to live another week.

Charisma zero or Manipulation zero suggests a person who cannot influence other people at all. Perhaps you are unbelievably obnoxious or withdrawn to the point of autism.

Appearance zero is so hideous that people scream at the sight of you. Facial scarring or deformity must be truly severe before a character can have Appearance zero.

Perception zero renders a character almost totally oblivious to her surroundings. Even blind, deaf Helen Keller didn't have Perception zero, though a person who's falling-down drunk might qualify.

Intelligence 0 indicates a mental handicap so severe that the person needs institutional care and cannot think at all.

Wits 0 means you are utterly dazed or panicked and cannot mount any sensible reaction to new events.

applies handily to Talents, and there are more than a few people who will simply never excel at them, no matter how hard they try. The advantage to Talents' innateness, however, is that everyone possesses the primary 12 to at least *some* degree. Thus, one may attempt a Talent for which he has no rating without incurring a difficulty penalty.

ALERTHESS

"Wait a minute," Kate said into the receiver. "Did you hear that?"

On the other end of the line, John was busy growing further confused. What she'd been telling him was shocking enough, and now that she'd stopped short—right at her story's climax—he felt he was dangling on the edge of a precipice.

"Wait... did I hear what you just said, or—"

"Shush!" Kate cut him off. If he didn't know better, John would swear that she seemed to be holding her breath.

"That... clicking," she said at last. "John, someone knows. Get out of the house."

Alertness is a measure of awareness in relation to your physical surroundings. There's nothing supernatural about this Ability; it simply represents your attunement to your senses and your senses' sensitivity to their environment. Alertness is often involved when you need to notice something about your present situation that may not be readily apparent to those less perceptive.

- Novice: You're constantly aware of what transpires around you.
- • Practiced: You can tell when a car is following you.

- Competent: You can easily follow a round of Three Card Monty.
- •••• Expert: Nobody catches you by surprise.
- • • Master: You can determine the type of gun being fired by the sound of a shell casing hitting the floor.

Possessed by: Agents, Hunters, Journalists, Paranoiacs, Police/Security Guards

Specialties: Bodyguarding, Crowds, Hidden Objects, Specific Sense, Spectres

ATHLETICS

Ben almost ducked right into the damn punch. He had hunched over to avoid leaning back any further and, thus, falling right off the roof. He felt the thing's attack swish over the top of his head. His feet gripped the gravel-covered ledge and he shifted his weight forward — into the advancing blip. He knew he would have to time this very carefully....

Ben's raging opponent thrust out its other shadowy arm, but Ben grabbed it, pivoting to the side, feet still hugging the corner of the building. With one fluid motion, Ben brought his other arm around the back of the blip and pushed. His other hand pulled the creature's wrist out into the air above the alley. The thing uttered a final, surprised grunt before stumbling off the ledge and into darkness.

Ben had always secretly appreciated the fact that ghosts can't fly.

This Trait is a measure of general physical fitness and skill in using your body for activities requiring agility and precision. Almost any roll involving climbing, leaping or running might call for Athletics to complete

successfully. Athletics' moves require a combination of Physical Attributes and inborn motor skills, and any roll that requires only an Attribute should not involve Athletics. Note that Athletics also covers the use of thrown weapons, given the coordination required to make such an attack effective.

- Novice: You're comfortable in your skin and you move fluidly.
- • Practiced: You can hold your own on the playing field.
- ••• Competent: You can still be a contender.
- •••• Expert: Olympic gold is in reach for you.
- •••• Master: You could earn millions playing professional sports.

Possessed by: Aerobics Instructors, Athletes, Children, Dancers, Soldiers

Specialties: Acrobatics, Dodging, General Fitness, Gymnastics, Sports, Swimming

AWARENESS

Chet approached the animal slowly, his eyes focused on the rise and fall of its labored breathing. It seemed a little too convenient to begin with — an injured dog blocking his path just when he needed to get by — and there was something weird about it, as well. Nearing the beast, Chet caught a glimpse of its fur and stopped in his tracks. He was no dog expert, but his gut told him that German Shepherds did not grow hair that looked like a bramble of thorns.

Sensing that the jig was up, the suddenly healthy "dog" sat up and turned to face Chet, its "fur" rippling like a pond disturbed. Milky-white bile dripped from its now-snarling maw, hissing loudly as it splattered the asphalt below.

"I'm tired of being right," Chet said with a growl and reached for his gun.

Broadly speaking, Awareness could be called the psychic counterpart to Alertness. This Ability comes into play when you're aware that things are not as they should be. This is usually due to the presence of either the unnatural or the supernatural, set against the backdrop of the natural world. Such can come in handy when searching for evidence of Horror usage, or when detecting the presence of Spectres or other supernatural beings. Storytellers can also call for Awareness rolls when something contrary to the laws of nature is about to unfold.

- Novice: You can distinguish the far-off screech of an alley cat from a Banshee's wail.
- • Practiced: Your spiritual instincts rarely let you down.
- ••• Competent: You'd make a great psychic friend.
- •••• Expert: You are as attuned to the supernatural as you are to the natural.

•••• Master: With a simple sniff of the air, you can sense an impending breach.

Possessed by: Occult Investigators, Parapsychologists, Psychics, Tarot Readers

Specialties: Animals, Bad Mojo, Houses, Specific Creatures, Weird Objects

BRAWL

"Trust me when I say, you don't wanna do this," Ben said, pointing an accusing forefinger at the enraged ghost facing him. After the briefest pause, the dead construction worker advanced anyway, his meaty fists clenched at his sides.

"Stupid," Ben muttered and stepped forward to meet his opponent. The ghost's first swing came in high, a clumsy roundhouse that gave Ben all the time to duck down and move into his enemy's space. He shot up like a rocket, leading with a vicious uppercut that hit home on the underside of the dead man's chin. To the surprise of both combatants, the man's plasmal jaw not only unhinged but disconnected, twirling up and away from the fray. Both men stared, each agape for different reasons, as the disembodied jaw landed with a splat and disintegrated.

"What..." Ben said, laughing. "It's not like I didn't tell you. Stupid."

Brawl is the gentle art of hitting something and watching it fall down. Mechanically, it serves as a catch-all term for any and all types of unarmed combat, from the most sophisticated of Eastern disciplines to the mewling swings of belligerent drunkards. The Ability covers any sort of pugilistic activity, from simple jabs and hooks, to wild haymakers, sidekicks and even the "dirty stuff," such as eye-gouging, hair-pulling and the sadly popular knee-to-the-groin. In general, any type of combat that doesn't involve a weapon can be classified as Brawl (though some would contest the fact that knees don't qualify as weapons).

- Novice: You were the class bully in school, or at least you could have been.
- • Practiced: If you hit someone, he wouldn't likely forget it anytime soon.
- ••• Competent: The class bully knew enough to leave you the hell alone.
- •••• Expert: You're the guy everyone invites when they go downtown at night.
- Master: Your fights usually only involve two hits — you hitting them, and them hitting the floor.

Possessed by: Bad Muthafuckas, Boxers, Cops, Martial Artists, Soldiers

Specialties: Boxing, Dirty Fighting, Self-Defense, Specific Martial Art

EMPATHY

Annie watched as the young girl traced spirals on the fogged-up glass of her bathroom mirror. Once again, Annie had arrived too late and the teenager's father was already in bed and asleep, snoring like a bloated dog. All she could do now was watch the frazzled girl poked at her own tear-streaked reflection. The girl's jittering finger spelled out one lonely word:

ENOUGH.

"Oh, honey..." Annie whispered, barely stifling a sob. "You bet it is."

This Talent represents one's inborn aptitude at reading the moods and emotions of others. Some rely on body language, while others master the nuances of a conversation's flow and how it changes with the speaker's emotional state. Empathy also includes the degree to which the character understands feelings in general, whether he sympathizes or experiences them or not. It's useful for knowing whether someone is faking an emotion, covering up their true feelings or lying outright.

- Novice: You can depend on the "vibes" you sense off other people to guide you.
- Practiced: People frequently come to you for advice and support.
- Competent: Your insight into people and their motives is profound.
- •••• Expert: The human spirit is like an open book to you.
- •••• Master: Your psychiatrist told you about his mother.

Possessed by: Actors, Counselors, Parents, Salespeople, Social Workers, Teachers

Specialties: Disorders, Emotions, Lies, Motives, Repressed Memories

EXPRESSION

"Maybe I didn't make myself clear. Failure is not an option, ladies and gentlemen. I expect nothing but the best from you, and the best is what I better get! Can you honestly sit there and tell me — or yourselves — that you signed on just so you could fail? Have all the experiences we've endured been for nothing? Now, come on... who's with me!"

Chet realized he was plying the troops with every cliché in the book, but hey, the old standards are tried and true for a reason. Besides, if luck was on his side tonight, they would work just fine.

The power of the word, be it written or spoken, is mighty indeed. This Ability covers the character's facility with words and with using them to best effect. Expression represents any kind of wordcraft, whether the aim is to evoke a particular feeling or to provide convincing arguments. It includes all forms of expression through language, from poetry to oratory to creative exposition. Characters can use Expression to compose essays or put the right finishing touches on a rousing speech or evening

WHAT ABOUT DODGE?

There is no specific "Dodge" Trait in Orpheus games. So, you ask, how then do characters negotiate the evasion of opponents' blows? Well, the answer is simple: If a character devotes one or more actions of his turn to dodging (see Multiple Actions, p. 211), he must roll Dexterity + (variable Ability) at a standard difficulty of 6. In some cases, the player gets to choose which Ability constitutes the second half of his pool, as appropriate to his situation. Most folks will use Dexterity + Athletics, but if the character is, say, a boxer, he may roll Dexterity + Brawl to dodge. Likewise, a master fencer might roll Dexterity + Melee to dodge. In no event can a character roll to dodge an attack he doesn't know is coming. Storytellers are entitled to determine what constitutes fair warning in all cases.

dinner toast. When used well, it can even sway others' opinions or keep an entire audience enthralled for hours.

- Novice: You were a regular feature of your high school literary magazine.
- • Practiced: Your command of language's function and form serves you well.
- ••• Competent: You choose your words carefully and to astonishing effect.
- •••• Expert: You can be a best-selling author or presidential speech-writer.
- •••• Master: Cicero, Daniel Webster... and you.

Possessed by: Actors, Columnists, Comedians, Demagogues, Orators, Writers

Specialties: Drama, Game Design, Improvisation, Poetry, Prose, Speeches

INTIMIDATION

"Look... you're about to force me into the 'don't-make-me-tell-you-twice' routine," said Ben, staring down his nose at the snitch. "It's a fuckin' old routine and, frankly, I'm tired of it. Been thinkin' about just beating the truth out of you, to be honest. Know what I mean?"

The filthy oaf glanced briefly down at the revolver nestled in Ben's waistband, then sighed deeply and sat down on the ground, cross-legged.

"All right! Jesus, man... what the hell do you want to know?"

Whoever said "you catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar" apparently didn't realize that a big right arm can be more persuasive than either. This Ability covers the many ways in which a character might "motivate" someone to do something, typically through fear and the threat of physical harm. The character may accomplish this through overt verbal threats (backed up by some show of force) or through the subtle reorganizing

of furniture in such a way as to belittle one's guests (making them sit in the small, uncomfortable chair, for example). Characters can use Intimidation to convince someone to cooperate when he otherwise would be opposed to the idea (and, more often than not, when all other options have been exhausted). In this fashion the character can force someone to back down from a fight or cough up information.

- Novice: You win the occasional staring contest.
- • Practiced: People tend to back off when you're angry.
- ••• Competent: You end more fights with a look than by violence.
- •••• Expert: You earn wide berth wherever you go.
- •••• Master: Drill sergeants run screaming from you like little girls.

Possessed by: Agents, Bouncers, Bullies, Cult Leaders, Executives, Gangsters

Specialties: Bluffing, Frightening, Puffing Up, Stare-Downs, Veiled Threats

INTRIGUE

"There! There it was again... did you see it?" Kate was up and out of her chair now, waving her arms frantically at the television. This was the third time this week she'd received "messages" coming from the old boob tube, and John was beginning to fear for the old girl's sanity.

"No," he said honestly. "For the third time, Katie, all I see is static. Loud static, thanks to you. How's about turning that noise down, hmm?" She continued, ignoring everything he'd just said, including (to his dismay) his request.

"I think I get it, now!" she said over the static, still pointing at the screen. "It's one of us, John. Or at least, it's one of them. He's using television to broadcast a message to those of us who can understand him. It's his way of communicating without getting caught! Brilliant, really, if you look at it."

"Brilliant," John said with sigh. "Now, how's about making it quietly brilliant?"

Intrigue is the fine art of plotting and scheming against one's enemies (and, on occasion, one's "allies"). It's a Talent because some are just born with guile in the veins, and it's difficult for someone to learn (or be taught) how to use it properly if they don't have it from the beginning. It's very much an intuitive game and a character who knows the rules can manipulate others through deceit, discern truth from the vagaries of political oratory and lay bare his enemies' deepest secrets and vulnerabilities. It is important to note the distinction between Intrigue and Subterfuge; the latter involves actual work toward an end, while Intrigue operates on a more theoretical and consequential level. Characters might use Subterfuge when writing forged missives;

Intrigue is the art of knowing whose handwriting to forge for best effect.

- Novice: You know how the game is played.
- Practiced: You're aware of the differences between individuals of power and groups in power.
- ••• Competent: You can handle multiple plots effectively.
- •••• Expert: People who double-cross you often find they've been duped.
- • • Master: You could have taught Machiavelli a thing or two.

Possessed by: Agents, Cheerleaders, Journalists, Politicians, Spymasters

Specialties: Alliances, Corporations, Coups, Details, Orpheus Group

INTUITION

"Which way, Zöe? I need to know now," Hoyt said through the radio, the steering wheel moving of its own accord. They'd been following the black Lincoln for only a few minutes, but it had already lost them in midtown's maze of alleys and side streets. Zöe thought for a moment, feeling the waves of Hoyt's anxiety wash into her like warm tides. Then, without meaning to, she spoke.

"Go right, up there!" she said, suddenly certain. "That has to be it."

Whether people call them "hunches" or "gut feelings" or even subconscious logic, the ability to leap intellectually to a sound conclusion is the subject of Intuition. Simply put, Intuition is the ability to choose or discern between two or more options and have a better chance of picking the "right" one in the process — without actually thinking through, or about, the decision. When a person's instincts seem to save him from trouble more often than not, then he probably has a high score in this Ability. It comes into play whenever a character must make a decision largely at random (or with little time or information on which to go), like deciding which wire to cut or picking the right door to escape through. Players may call for an Intuition roll when they are stuck or must make a decision quickly, or the Storyteller can even roll players' Intuitions for them, in times when they need a leg up or clue from which to proceed.

- Novice: Your gut feelings are stronger and more accurate — than most.
- • Practiced: You've learned to trust your instincts, and they serve you well.
- ••• Competent: When you get a bad feeling about something, people listen.
- •••• Expert: Others are wise to heed your advice, whatever the topic.
- •••• Master: You're so accurate that your instincts verge on preternatural.

Possessed by: Daredevils, Entrepreneurs, Gamblers, Stock-Brokers

Specialties: Business, Danger, Gambling, Inspiration, Luck

LEADERSHIP

"I don't suppose I have to further impress upon you the gravity of this assignment," Craig said, leaning forward. His tall frame and military style crewcut only underlined the strength of his personal presence. "What we have here is a hostile of the worst order, fellow agents. And we need to bring him down."

With that, Craig strode forward to a map of the city that took up the better part of the back wall of the conference room. He paused a moment for emphasis, then slowly turned to face the assembled crucible.

"Now," he said, with an iron tenor to his voice. "Here's what I want you to do...."

When one is trying to organize a crucible and focus on the task at hand, Leadership is a valuable commodity. It represents one's innate ability to assume command of situations and to direct others, as well as that intangible quality that draws people to follow his lead. Being strong on Leadership doesn't necessarily mean making better decisions, or that you're better at solving problems than people under your command, but it does make you good at organizing the efforts of those people tackling those same problems.

- Novice: You can get your friends and relatives motivated toward a set task.
- • Practiced: The force of your presence is an inspiration to others.
- ••• Competent: You can take charge in most situations and make it work.
- •••• Expert: You actually have followers, in whatever form, and you lead well.
- •••• Master: You could lead nations or multinational corporations easily.

Possessed by: Demagogues, Directors, Executives, Managers, Military Officers

Specialties: Delegation, Direction, Inspiration, Oration, Organization

STREETWISE

The dirty little cholo was obviously afraid for his life, now that he'd spilled everything. Ben studied him with mild amusement as he squirmed.

"Who the hell's got you so spooked, anyway?" Ben said at last, softening his voice so he appeared friendlier. It rarely worked, but he was trying to get good at it, nonetheless. After a minute, the little rat squeaked.

"A guy named King Shanghai," the punk said, obviously expecting Ben to have no clue who that was. Ben was more than happy to surprise on that score, though he generally liked

hiding the extent of his street savvy. Ben figured he knew more about this town than some folks might find comfortable.

When folks refer to the "seedy underbelly" of society, they're usually referring to those who are well-versed in Streetwise. This Ability allows a character to fit in to the street scene, make contacts, gather information, buy and sell on the black market and otherwise take full advantage of urbane culture and resources. It's also invaluable for those who need to navigate the streets (especially in a hurry) and avoid both the law and the gangs.

- Novice: You knew your way around the old neighborhood.
- • Practiced: You know the streets, and they know you.
- • Competent: Your name commands respect and you've got connections.
- •••• Expert: You're an insider, a true fixture of the street scene.
- •••• Master: You're up on just about everything that goes down in this town.

Possessed by: Beat Cops, Criminals, Detectives, Gangsters, Homeless

Specialties: Black Market, Connections, Gangs, Rumor Mill, Vice

SUBTERFUGE

"Well, I must say, I hadn't thought of that," Tom said, putting on his best quizzical look. The utter load of steaming bullshit he was being handed was going down rough, and if he didn't look like he was swallowing it all, there would be trouble. The Assistant Director stared at him for a moment, eyes narrowing into feral slits.

"So," the man continued at last, "we understand each other then, yes? Not a word of this to anyone else, Mr. Hayes. Not a single word." ADs liked adding emphasis.

"Absolutely, sir," Tom said, without so much as an eyelash out of place. "I got it."

Subterfuge is the fine art of deception. Those who have this Ability know how to conceal their motives, hide their actual feelings and otherwise lie their heads off whenever engaged in conversation. This Talent also represents how good a character is at noticing when others are doing the deceiving. To tell a truly convincing lie, hide one's reactions or pick up on deceit, one must use Subterfuge. In game play, it is most often used to manipulate people, but characters can, and do, develop it to avoid being manipulated themselves.

- Novice: People of average trust usually can't tell when you're lying.
- Practiced: You've got a decent poker face and can pull off a good bluff.
- ••• Competent: You can keep track of entire webs of lies you've built.

- •••• Expert: You can pull off a complex con game and do it with style.
- • • Master: You're so full of it, everyone trusts you implicitly.

Possessed by: Actors, Agents, Grifters, Lawyers, Politicians, Teenagers

Specialties: Con Games, Hiding Emotions, Misdirection, Seduction, White Lies

SHILLS

Unlike Talents, which are largely hereditary in nature, Skills are learned and acquired Abilities, developed through study and practice. If a character tries using a Skill in which he has no dots, he must roll the appropriate accompanying Attribute as normal, but with a difficulty increase of one. Unskilled characters just aren't as effective as those who understand the tricks of the trade.

AUIMAL KEN

"Nice kitty kitty..." whispered Hoyt, edging around the side of the house. Animals always made him nervous when he was skimming, probably because he always made them nervous in the process. If this friggin' cat blew his cover, he'd never forgive himself. And he sure as hell would never live it down at the office.

As he sidled around to the back of the building, the cat rose up on the tips of its toes and hissed wildly. Although the sound was not very loud on its own, the combination of the late hour and Hoyt's nerves made it seem like an alarm.

"Shit," Hoyt said, backing toward the street. "Foiled by Fluffy!"

This Skill pertains to animals of all kinds, from understanding their behavior to taming and training wild critters. It also allows characters to communicate with animals (at least to some degree) and to get them to do as they're told. This can be an especially important Ability at times, since animals are often spooked (pun intended) by ghosts.

- Novice: "Sit, Rover... roll over... now, play dead!"
- • Practiced: You know a little about animals and can properly train a dog.
- ••• Competent: You can run an obedience school for pets.
- •••• Expert: You can handle even the most dangerous animals with grace.
- •••• Master: You are the beast-master.

Possessed by: Animal Breeders, Circus Performers, Farmers, Hunters, Trainers

Specialties: Attack Training, Calming, Communication, Guarding, Wild Beasts

CRAFTS

"Wow, that's a very nice... thing you've made. What the hell is it?" John asked, turning it around in his hands. It looked like a paper airplane made of wood, but that couldn't possibly be right. That would, of course, be dumb beyond belief.

"It's a model, you cretin," Kate said, snatching it back. "That's what I get for trying to instill some culture into you."

Whether it's cooking, sculpting, carpentry or even mechanics, this Ability covers any type of work one might do with one's hands. Characters skilled in a chosen craft can build, create or modify functional things or works of art using this Skill. The Storyteller sets the difficulty and time required of any related endeavor, typically anywhere from a few minutes to days or weeks of work. Characters with this Skill must choose a specialty, although they don't gain a bonus for it until they have 4 or more dots in their chosen interest.

- Novice: You tinker around with simple craft projects.
- Practiced: You know your craft's subtleties and little-known details.
- ••• Competent: You can make a living plying your craft.
- Expert: Others are regularly impressed with your work.
- •••• Master: You're a true master, and would be seen as such.

Possessed by: Artists, Carpenters, Chefs, Inventors, Mechanics

Specialties: Any specific craft, like Carpentry, Cooking, Drawing or Pottery]

DRIVE

The Camaro screamed down the alley, whipping newspaper and other debris in its spinning wake. Hoyt was struggling to follow the Lincoln in front of him while simultaneously avoiding the trash cans forming the real borders of his driving lane.

"You are going to get us killed," Zöe said casually. She slapped the steering wheel.

"Nah..." Hoyt replied through the radio; he smiled and the engine revved in response. "Him, maybe... but not us, sweetcheeks."

This Skill does *not* represent the ability to drive a car, since **Orpheus** assumes that all modern characters have a basic familiarity with handling and operating an automobile in normal situations. Drive as a Skill allows the character to perform tricky maneuvers, evade pursuers and engage in road combat, all at dangerously high speeds. The Storyteller can raise the difficulty of a Drive roll, depending upon how familiar the character is with the operant vehicle.

Novice: You can safely maneuver a vehicle in sub-par conditions.

- • Practiced: You can navigate through heavy traffic or multiple obstacles.
- ••• Competent: Driving in Boston during the winter is a snap for you.
- •••• Expert: You can make a living as a race-car or stunt driver.
- •••• Master: There's no vehicle or stunt you can't handle.

Possessed by: Bikers, Cabbies, Chauffeurs, Police, Truckers

Specialties: High Speeds, Motorcycles, Off-Roading, Stunts, Shaking Tails

ETIQUETTE

"I must say, I've never seen you look so dashing," Kate said, smiling ingenuously. The Assistant Director returned her smile, but it was nonetheless a lean and hungry look, one borne of professionalism rather than geniality. Nevertheless, Kate pushed on. She needed him to open up to her.

"Why, thank you, Kate," he said, cupping the curve of her elbow in his hand. She pretended not to notice. "I wasn't aware that you'd be at this event tonight."

"Oh, you know me," she said, smiling idiotically. "I go where the action is...."

Etiquette is the measure of a character's understanding of the nuances and delicate balances of different societies in a myriad of social circumstances. It provides guidance when saying or doing the "proper" thing, and it allows a character to fit in gracefully, act with decorum, earn respect and deal with others in a diplomatic fashion. Characters may use this Skill when dealing with polite society, whereas Streetwise concerns "street" rules and mores. Specialties often come in the form of a particular culture or setting.

- Novice: You know the language and rules well enough not to insult someone.
- • Practiced: You gracefully blend into most social situations.
- ••• Competent: Your grace and tact never fail you, whether as host or guest.
- •••• Expert: You can be a professional diplomat... or spy.
- • • Master: You can handle nearly any social scenario and make it look easy.

Possessed by: Clergy, Diplomats, Politicians, Socialites, Spymasters

Specialties: Any specific subculture: Business, High Society, Religious, etc.

FIREARMS

"That's right, nimrod, keep on moving. I guess you want to be shot tonight." Ben was standing on the ledge of the roof four stories up, his shooting hand and gun hanging out over the edge. The underworld figure known as King Shanghai was in the courtyard below, moving furtively among the dark spaces between streetlights. At the sound of his voice, the figure stopped and Ben could swear he heard a muted chuckle drift up from down below.



"Oh, you don't think I can hit you from here?" Ben said, cocking his revolver. "Wouldn't be the first dead man to make that mistake, that's for sure."

When all else fails, and negotiation is no longer an option, there are always guns. This Skill covers identifying, using and maintaining all sorts of firearms, from pistols to assault rifles to fully automatic machine guns. It does not, however, cover heavy weapons like bazookas or rocket launchers. Characters can roll Perception + Firearms to recognize a particular type of gun and Wits + Firearms to fix a gun jam during a firefight.

- Novice: You've fired a gun before and know how the thing works.
- • Practiced: You use firearms on a fairly regular basis and are a decent shot.
- ••• Competent: Your gunslinging hand has seen its share of action in the field.
- •••• Expert: You score well in marksmanship tests and know a lot about guns.
- •••• Master: You can field-strip your firearm in the dark, and you almost always hit.

Possessed by: Gangsters, Gun Enthusiasts, Fumigators, Police, Survivalists

Specialties: Automatics, Fast-Draw, Rifles, Shotguns, Pistols, Sniping

MEDITATION

Tom closed the door to his office and walked back to the center of the room. After his encounter with the AD, he was in desperate need of some centering. He'd actually started practicing meditation back before joining the program, as part of his anti-cancer regimen. He'd found that it cleared him of some very unwanted negative energy back then, and it had served him well since joining Orpheus. Now, all he wanted was to find that place again. Dealing with these people made him feel... dirty; he needed to cleanse his thoughts if he was going to be at all prepared for what lay ahead.

One of the most useful skills an Orpheus Group agent can master is the ability to edge out all distractions, including and especially those caused by malevolent forces, and focus all attention upon the matter at hand. This Skill covers all aspects of meditation, from deep breathing to full on biofeedback, and does not necessarily involve use of the lotus (or any other particular) position. Indeed, Meditation is perhaps the most individual of skills, allowing each practitioner to develop his own unique method based upon what works best for him. Meditation is also useful for regaining lost Willpower by entering a comalike trance during which time the character's spirit reinvigorates itself. After each full hour in this trance, the player rolls Meditation alone against difficulty 9, although conducive surroundings, like peaceful music or incense burning, may reduce this difficulty to as low as 6 (at the Storyteller's discretion). Success on this roll restores one point of Willpower, while each botched roll indicates the loss of yet another Willpower. If this meditation is forcefully interrupted and the character loses concentration before any given hour is up, he loses his "banked" time and gains no benefit.

Additionally, all skimmers need the Skill Meditation to project within a single turn. Otherwise, they need a full minute to separate soul from meat. In emergency situations, however, the character without dots in this Skill can project instantly using a Willpower roll (difficulty 8).

- Novice: You can block out the noise of your upstairs neighbor's vacuum.
- • Practiced: You can quickly achieve a peaceful repose.
- ••• Competent: You find a way to relax in nearly any position or situation.
- •••• Expert: It takes a hurricane to break your concentration once it's been established.
- •••• Master: You are glacial in your calm, and your serenity is imperturbable.

Possessed by: Athletes, Buddhists, Monks, Skimmers, Zen Masters

Specialties: Biofeedback, Centering, Deep Breathing, Skimming, Zen

かもしもも

"I don't suppose I could talk you out of this, eh, chum?" John said jovially, his back against the bar. The advancing Cro-Magnon brandished his "ace" pool cue — the very one that had just lost him two hundred bucks — and he seemed hell-bent on using it. "Didn't think so," John said, muttering more to himself.

The biker swung in a downward arc. John, however, pivoted to one side, snatching up a beer bottle from the counter in the process... he now had a bottle in each hand. The cue splintered against the bar with a sharp snap, but John brought the bottle in his left hand up in a jabbing motion, hammering the gut of his attacker. With his right hand, John smashed the second bottle against the back of the sore loser's head; it shattered in a spray of green glass. The fat man "oofed" one more time and fell flat on his stomach.

"Not to worry," John said, addressing the bar at large. "The drinks were on him."

In the modern age, fighting with hand-held weapons is practically a lost art. Aside from the occasional knife fight, there's little in the way of formalized melee, anymore. All the same, some characters are drawn to practicing such arts, giving them acquaintance with a variety of melee weapons, from clubs and knives to swords and even more exotic arms like axes and maces. Any weapon that a character can wield in close combat falls under this Skill — even broken bottles and other improvised arms. Note that thrown weapons are covered by the Athletics Talent.

- Novice: You know how to hold a melee weapon properly.
- • Practiced: You have the equivalent of basic training in armed combat.
- ••• Competent: You can make a weapon out of almost any object.
- •••• Expert: You can compete with professionals and teach them a trick or two.
- •••• Master: You actually *have* the know-how displayed in action movie sequences.

Possessed by: Fencers, Fumigators, Gangsters, Martial Artists, Soldiers

Specialties: Any specific weapon, like Axes, Knives, Swords or any specific maneuver, like Disarming, Parrying, Thrusting, etc.

PERFORMANCE

"Presto change-o!" John said with a wave and stage flourish, pointing to the man on the floor. "Watch, ladies and gentlemen, as I turn this perfectly ordinary biker into a bear rug!" At first, his gambit met with a few amazed stares, but when an inebriated gal in the back cackled, John knew he had them. And thank God for that.

This could have been a very tough crowd, indeed.

Whereas Expression represents the "gift of gab," Performance is the learned facet of the performing arts, be it acting, dancing, singing or playing music. This Skill typically carries a specialty of one kind or another, a particular area of study, though many performers are veritable jacks of all performing trades — the proverbial "all-around entertainers"). Performance comes into play whenever a character wishes to give a skilled and/or convincing performance. Combined with Expression, characters can create beautiful works and bring them to vivid life before an audience. Using Subterfuge, they can display a particular emotion and make it believable (a crucial application for any successful actor). Agents can also use Performance to make the most of their manifestations, either by playing up their own preternatural creepiness or by using their emotive skills to counter the visual effects of their own Stains.

- Novice: You've got talent, for an amateur.
- • Practiced: You're capable and comfortable in front of an audience.
- ••• Competent: Your confidence and ability impresses crowds.
- •••• Expert: Audiences are dazzled by your performances.
- •••• Master: You can pack houses and garner well-deserved standing ovations.

Possessed by: Actors, Dancers, Musicians, Orators, Singers

Specialties: Acting, Dancing, Musical Instrument, Singing, Stand-Up

SECURITY

"I want two men around back, you copy that?" Chet barked into the receiver. "And double-time it. We have no idea how long the southern approach has been exposed. B-team, you will join me in two-by-two cover formation; C-team, double check the perimeter alarms and make sure you have that video feed up and running by o-five-hundred. I'm not taking any chances with these guys."

Some would argue that Security is as much a Talent as it is a Skill, and there is some merit to that statement. Levels in Security offer a character a deep understanding of how to secure people, places and items, as well as to overcome the security measures emplaced by others. This aptitude covers everything from securing a location to installing alarms and other security systems, as well as circumventing them. Characters can recognize different security measures with a Perception + Security roll, and figure out the design and weaknesses with an Intelligence + Security roll. Bypassing a particular security system may require Dexterity or Intelligence for the Attribute, depending on the system.

- Novice: You're familiar with standard locks and home security measures.
- Practiced: You can hot-wire a car or pick a simple lock.
- ••• Competent: You know much about security systems and techniques.
- •••• Expert: You can install a state-of-the-art security system, or bypass one.
- •••• Master: There's no security system you can't improve or defeat.

Possessed by: Agents, Bodyguards, Criminals, Security Consultants, Stalkers

Specialties: Alarms, Electronics, Escape, Lockpicking, On-Site Security

STEALTH

The dingy rowhouse sure had a lot of guards, considering the neighborhood. Hoyt saw at least two punks in black for each entrance, and those were just the ones he'd spotted thus far. Thankfully, none had spotted him yet.

No sooner had that thought occurred to him when another punk stepped into view just down the alleyway from where Hoyt now stood. As he watched, the thug lifted his rifle and walked toward Hoyt's nook. Just before the punk approached the corner, Hoyt pressed his back against the wall, pushing himself further into the nook's shadows. The punk walked right by Hoyt, oblivious to the danger. Hoyt silently moved behind the thug, then quickly reconsidered knocking him out. Instead, he reached out quietly.

The thug spun around, but there was nobody there... Hoyt was already dematerialized and inside the rifle, waiting for the thug to bring him inside the operation.

Whether remaining motionless or sneaking on the move, this Skill allows a character to hide, pure and simple. As a rule, players typically roll Dexterity + Stealth (difficulty 6) resisted by a would-be viewer's Perception + Alertness (difficulty 6) to escape notice. If the character scores fewer successes than the target, the adversary spots him. Storytellers might opt to make Stealth rolls secretly, since a character rarely knows whether his attempt at stealth has been successful or not.

- Novice: You can hide behind large objects or in dark places.
- • Practiced: You can fade into a crowd or follow someone relatively covertly.
- ••• Competent: You're rarely noticed unless you wish to be.
- •••• Expert: You can sneak across an open field without being seen or walk a gravel path with no noise.
- •••• Master: You're like a ninja, one who moves as a ghost.

Possessed by: Commandos, Fumigators, Reporters, Spies, Thieves

Specialties: Camouflage, Crowds, Darkness, Shadowing, Sneaking

SURVIVAL

To the girl, the snap of each twig and branch sounded like a cavernous dinner bell, calling her to the attention of all local wildlife. She was positive she was running in circles now, and she feared that if the evil spirit didn't get her, Mother Nature certainly would. Just then, she heard another twig snap, this time from behind her and to the right. The girl let out a thin yelp and spun around, nearly falling over herself in the process.

"It's okay," Tom said, stepping out of the shadows. "You're safe now. Just stay with me and I'll get us out of these woods in one piece."

Although most characters are dependent on the creature comforts of modern living, there are those who haven't forgotten what it takes (and what it means) to survive in the wild. This Skill covers surviving in the wilderness with only simple tools and resources. The more dots one has, the fewer resources one needs to survive. Characters can live off the land, avoid the dangers of the environment, find shelter, etc. Characters should pick a specialty representing the environment they know best.

- Novice: You've gone camping a few times.
- • Practiced: You've camped a lot and probably taken survival courses, too.
- Competent: You can care for a small group of people in the wilderness.
- •••• Expert: You can live off the land indefinitely.
- • • Master: You are one with whatever environment you're in.

Possessed by: Boy Scouts, Campers, Commandos, Hunters, Survivalists

Specialties: Any specific environment, like Arctic, Desert, Forest, Urban or any specific aspect of survival, like Hazards, Hunting, Shelter, etc.

TECHNOLOGY

"You must be joking," Kate said with a flat expression. "If you want someone to fix something mechanical, I am not that person." She held out her hands like it might absolve hers of all responsibility. John snickered gleefully.

"Oh, have no fear, dear. I didn't honestly expect you would, but I couldn't resist getting your reaction to the very suggestion," he said, tossing her another wink.

The wonders of the modern world are marvelous, indeed — the electronic era of life's rich pageant. Those who possess this Skill are familiar with the electronic works of the current age and can operate, understand, repair and even build or upgrade them. Purely mechanical devices fall under the Crafts Skill, while specific computer hardware and software expertise relates to Computer Knowledge (p. 177). Characters without this Skill may know how to operate various machines and devices, but they won't necessarily know how they work inside, or how to fix and repair them.

- Novice: You can rewire a lamp and make some small household repairs.
- • Practiced: You can do basic electronic work or build a crystal radio set.
- ••• Competent: You're a skilled electrical engineer, able to fix or build adeptly.
- •••• Expert: You can alter or upgrade existing electronic equipment.
- • • • Master: You're ahead of your time when it comes to technological designs.

Possessed by: Criminals, Engineers, Repair Personnel, Spies, Technicians

Specialties: Appliances, Communications, Customization, Invention, Vehicles

HOULEDGES

The final category of Abilities, Knowledges are distinct in that characters acquire them through study and involved application. As such, Knowledges are most often paired with Mental Attributes (a Stamina + Academics roll, for example, would be a weird roll, indeed). If a character doesn't have a ranking in a Knowledge Ability, his player cannot attempt to make a roll involving it without Storyteller permission. If one doesn't know something, he doesn't know it and trying won't help much. Players may wish to distinguish (somewhere on the character sheet) between Knowledges learned through formal education and those learnt on their own (and without the added prestige of a degree).

ACADEMICS

"Earth gapes, hell burns, saints pray, to have him suddenly covey'd away."

Ben blinked at his opponent, the man whose face he still couldn't see. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?" Ben asked, pointing an accusing finger.

"It's Shakespeare, friend," said the man known as King Shanghai. "And what it means to you, Ben Cotton," he said, drawing a pair of curved blades from his cloak, "is that our little game of cat and mouse draws to its end."

This Knowledge represents an education in the liberal arts, including history, literature, philosophy, sociology and a bit of psychology. It can also serve as a benchmark for the character's overall level of formal education and experience with the academic world. Characters must choose a specialty, though they will still have a broad understanding of those related areas outside their chosen specialty. The vast majority of Academics rolls involve Intelligence to recall particular facts, though other Attributes may hold relevance in some cases. The difficulty of Academics rolls is dependent upon the obscurity of the information one is trying to recall, from 4 (routine things) to 8 (very obscure).

- Novice: You have the equivalent of an associate's degree in the arts.
- • Practiced: You can hold your own in any discussion involving humanities.
- ••• Competent: You're a veritable font of esoteric knowledge.
- •••• Expert: When you get going, you can easily lose people in your scholarly wake.
- • • Master: You are a certified expert in your chosen field of study.

Possessed by: Academics, Historians, Literary Critics, Professors, Writers.

Specialties: Architecture, Art, History, Literature, Music, Sociology.

BUREAUCRACY

John smiled at the woman behind the counter. He was taking a big risk coming here, but he hoped that his knowledge of the process (combined with a little smooth talking) would do the trick.

"Hmm... I don't see any record of the transaction, mister... Carruthers, was it?"

"Actually, it's Carters, ma' am. John Carters. You should find my file right there, with all the other C's," he said, giving her his polished smirk and stage-perfected wink. When she blushed, he knew he'd hit paydirt.

Bureaucracy represents a character's ability to wrangle what he wants from the system, whether by paperwork, phone calls, bribery or what have you. It is useful for manipulating various city or institutional officials, navigating the political organ or even operating a bureaucracy of one's own design. Those with high levels in this Knowledge are among the most organized people in the world.

- Novice: You can file your own tax returns with no problems.
- •• Practiced: You can file other peoples' tax returns and get them refunds.
- ••• Competent: You can stall an angry citizen indefinitely.
- •••• Expert: You can effectively manage a branch of the government (if they'd let you).
- •••• Master: The system is your playground... all it takes is a phone call.

Possessed by: Accountants, Bureaucrats, Civil Servants, Executive Assistants

Specialties: Accounting, Code, Governmental Regulations, Requisitions, Taxes

COMPUTER

Terrence glided his essence along the twisting mass of circuits that led to the mainframe. He passed what should have been firewall, but wasn't. For all their security precautions, the network never even considered safeguarding their system from intrusion of this kind. Christ, they didn't even reroute most of this stuff.

"Shame, shame," Terrence whispered to himself and climbed into the hard drive.

This Knowledge is becoming more and more important as the Digital Age advances into the 21st century. It covers the operations and programming of computers and computer software, from routine procedures to in-depth knowledge of hardware and systems. With enough of a ranking, a character could easily command a considerable salary as a programmer or computer engineer. Quite a few people these days have at least one dot in Computer, especially in the West, but not so many are learned enough to really make computers work well.

- Novice: You can operate a computer, including email and word processing.
- • Practiced: You can do complicated data-entry and write simple programs.
- ••• Competent: You can design your own programs that work as well as any.
- •••• Expert: You can create and design both hardware and complex software.
- •••• Master: You know just about everything worth knowing about computers.

Possessed by: Engineers, Geeks, Hackers, Programmers,

Specialties: Hacking, Hardware, Internet, Research, Software, Viruses

ENIGMAS

"Do you have any idea what this is?" Kate asked, handing the woman the black oblong box. The woman turned it gently over in her hands. There was a grimacing, horned face pressed into the back cover, leering out like a clown.

"Oh, yes," the woman said, staring in wonderment. "It's a Gordian knot of Hellish intent, but before I say more... you must tell me where you found this, dear lady."

Mysteries, riddles and secrets are the purview of this Knowledge. It allows characters to pull together information for puzzles of all varieties, to piece together relevant facts and details of a given problem, and combine them into a coherent whole. It is also useful for piercing the veils of deception that supernatural forces often use to cloak their activities and goals.

- Novice: You can piece together jigsaw puzzles fairly well.
- • Practiced: You guessed Bruce Willis was dead before the movie ended.
- ••• Competent: You knew Bruce Willis was dead from the beginning of the movie.
- •••• Expert: You know what happens when a tree falls in a forest....
- •••• Master: Zeno's Paradox is a nice warm-up for you.

Possessed by: Gamers, Logicians, Mystics, Philosophers, Stage Magicians

Specialties: Head Games, Koans, Puzzles, Riddles, Wordplay

FINANCE

"Damn... if only we knew where the bastard's money was going," Zöe said, muttering and staring at the papers in front of her. Hoyt turned to look at her.

"How about I take a look at those?" he said, reaching for the file.

"You?" she said, her eyebrows rising in disbelief.

"Yeah, me," he said, laughing. "There's lots you don't know about me. hon."

This Knowledge covers the handling and making of money, from accounting and book-keeping to evaluating an item's worth or playing the stock market. Characters can use it to earn revenue legitimately or for things like insider trading and other financial scams. In addition to helping provide a comfortable level of wealth (see the Resources Background, p. 188), Finance is good for navigating paper trails or knowing how to conceal one's true assets.

- Novice: You have some basic experience with bookkeeping and finance.
- • Practiced: You have a degree (or equivalent) in accounting or finance.
- ••• Competent: Your knowledge is equivalent to having an MBA.

- •••• Expert: You could run a major corporation and turn a profit.
- ••••• Master: The stock market? Sounds like free money to you.

Possessed by: Accountants, Businessmen, Fences, Smugglers, Stock Brokers

Specialties: Accounting, Appraisal, Currency Exchange, Fencing, Stock Market

INVESTIGATION

Chet walked around the mansion's living room, stopping Kate's question with a finger. He finally turned to her, smiling.

"What're we doing here?" Kate asked. "The body was found upstairs."

"Spotted two things wrong here," Chet explained.

"Wrong?" Kate said. She looked around with a more critical eye now. "I see indents on the rug... the furniture was moved recently."

"Good... that's one."

Kate looked around briefly, then shrugged. "I give... everything looks normal. What's two?"

"There's a rectangular spot on the wall that's a little darker than the surrounding wallpaper, which is sun bleached. A painting was stolen."

"Ah," Kate said. "So, Mr. Tanners was strangled down here, but the assailant moved him upstairs so nobody would notice the missing picture."

"And in the struggle," Chet said, concluding Kate's thought, "they moved the furniture. The murderer never moved it back properly."

A character with this Knowledge is trained to search for clues and piece together evidence to solve problems, from investigating crimes to discovering secret or concealed goings-on. Investigation allows a character to find clues, piece them together, conduct research and track down leads.

- Novice: You're an amateur sleuth or armchair detective.
- • Practiced: You have a cop's eye and perspective on visual evidence.
- ••• Competent: You have a detective's savvy and experiential acuity.
- •••• Expert: You can be an FBI special agent or professional profiler.
- •••• Master: You and Sherlock Holmes, baby.

Possessed by: Agents, Coroners, Detectives, Police, Profilers

Specialties: Crime Scenes, Forensics, Interviews, Leads, Research

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"Get outta here, before I have you arrested," the building manager said, rolling up his sleeves. A manifested Craig turned to face the man. These threats were growing very

tedious, he decided, but he didn't want to tip the man off to his dead state by vanishing. Besides, Craig hated bullies.

"Oh, I don't think you'll be doing that," Craig replied, stepping forward. "See, if the police show up, I'll just point out all the housing infractions that you've accumulated running this little slum. Faulty pipes, exposed floorboards, no heating or hot water, rat droppings everywhere." Craig smiled.

"I see at least ten finable infractions and three more serious enough to land your ass in jail. Now... still interested in having me arrested?"

Those trained in Law have an understanding of legal codes and procedures, and can call upon their know-how to provide legal advice or figure out ways of addressing various legalities. Some may even be licensed to practice law officially. In the case of Orpheus Group agents, it is also very important that characters know how best to avoid the law, as well as the best ways to bend or interpret the law to their own advantage. Some can opt to focus on religious law as their specialty, and it remains a common concentration.

- Novice: You keep up with Court TV and can follow all the proceedings.
- • Practiced: You're a pre-law graduate, or at least have read many legal texts.
- ••• Competent: You have a law degree, or the equivalent thereof.

- •••• Expert: You can win the toughest cases and give the soundest legal advice.
- •••• Master: You can be (and maybe are) the Devil's Advocate.

Possessed by: Criminals, Judges, Lawyers, Police, Politicians

Specialties: Civil, Contract, Corporate, Criminal, Religious

LINGUISTICS

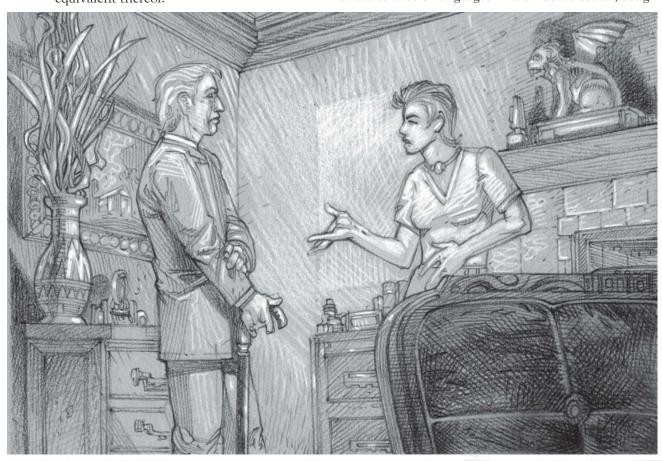
"I said hush!" Kate said, straining to hear the sound coming from the television set.

John was now convinced she was going mad.

"It's... English," Kate said, mumbling, "but broken. And maybe... a southern dialect?"

John could neither confirm nor refute her suspicions. Well, except maybe that Kate was going nuts.

Orpheus assumes that every character can speak, read and write in his native language, but this Knowledge governs any further linguistic ability. Dots in Linguistics allow a character to speak additional languages, as indicated below. The player chooses which languages his character knows (with Storyteller permission), and is not restricted to common, everyday tongues of the modern world. High levels in this Knowledge also indicate some understanding of the science of languages — their construction, design



and internal logic. Characters may choose the study of linguistics itself as one of their "language" choices to earn a more scholarly understanding of the topic.

- Novice: One extra language
- Practiced: Two extra languages
- ••• Competent: Four extra languages
- •••• Expert: Eight extra languages
- •••• Master: 16 extra languages

Possessed by: Diplomats, Linguists, Spies, Translators, World Travelers

Specialties: Codes and Ciphers, Slang, any modern/ancient or written language

M€DICIN€

Chet leaned over the broken, twisted body of the boy to search for signs of life. He pressed two fingers to the boy's throat, and with the other hand, counted time on his watch. The boy was fading fast, but there might just be time. Chet took off his jacket and covered his ward to stop him from going into shock. He then tore strips from his shirt, bandaging the wounds and sopping up the blood. In the distance, an ambulance wailed its approach.

This Trait represents an understanding of the workings of flesh and blood, specifically the human body and how to treat it. It involves knowledge of anatomy, physiology and basic medicinal techniques, as well as potential treatments. With more dots, it expands to include advanced diagnosis, treatment of disease and surgery — all the skills a physician (even if the character isn't licensed) might use. Those with this Knowledge can treat the injuries and maladies of themselves or others. Note that Medicine is all but useless in treating ghosts and projected entities, whose "bodies" are mere reflections of emotional states. If anything, psychology might work better.

- Novice: You know basic first-aid and CPR training.
- • Practiced: You can be a pre-med student or trained paramedic.
- ••• Competent: You're competent enough to be a licensed general practitioner.
- •••• Expert: Good enough to be a surgeon or skilled medical specialist.
- •••• Master: You're renowned for your acumen and skill in the field.

Possessed by: Doctors, Lifeguards, Nurses, Paramedics Specialties: Emergency Care, Pathology, Pharmacology, Poisons, Surgery

OCCULT

"Show me your hoary wisdom, oh most ancient of ancestor spirits," Allesius said, legs crossed and arms held out as if in supplication. "Reveal to me your secrets that I might help your descendants survive the final age."

Kate smirked, but stopped herself from laughing out loud. She couldn't believe she was this desperate, but there she was, paying for the "great Allesius'" services. Suddenly, however, the brazier of incense flared brightly for a moment, followed by the rise of a thickening wine-colored smoke. The purplish mist roiled wildly for a moment before spiraling upward in a corkscrew.

"Ah, yes..." Allesius whispered, peering at the mist. "Of course. I should have known."

In a world teeming with the supernatural, much information exists about the mysterious, the mythic, the legendary... the occult. In the World of Darkness some of it is true, but much of it is not. Occult grants a character knowledge of the preternatural and otherwordly, in both theory and practice. In addition, it gifts him with the ability to discern fact from fancy, and this is perhaps its greatest gift.

Storytellers should note that because **Orpheus** does not deal with a greater supernatural cosmology at the moment, he may wish to limit the effectiveness of this Knowledge. He may dictate that the characters know nothing of "clans" and "tribes," or may comfortably allow for chronicles delving into the greater World of Darkness.

- Novice: You've read a few books and picked up on some fundamentals.
- • Practiced: You've read a *lot* of books and know the obvious falsehoods.
- ••• Competent: You know all the major occult lore and a few obscure facts.
- •••• Expert: You can separate truth from fallacy, and you know a considerable deal.
- •••• Master: You're privy to secrets of which few others are aware.

Possessed by: Cultists, Mages, Neo-Pagans, Occultists, Parapsychologists

Specialties: Cultural Belief, Demons, Fairies, Mummies, Vampires, Werewolves

POLITICS

Chet leaned down so that his mouth was barely an inch above the speaker on his phone. "If you didn't hear me, I can repeat the request," he said sharply. "Or shall I just have the senator give you a call personally? I'm sure he won't mind." After a long moment, the voice on the other end of the line spoke.

"No, sir, it just took me a moment to find the file. I have it right here. There's no need to involve the senator."

The political game has its own set of rules, and a character with this Knowledge knows them inside out. Additionally, it represents some up-to-date awareness of the various power players in a given arena and how they got there. It represents a grasp of major issues and how they affect the political process, and provides an

understanding of the fundamentals of mortal politics. To truly excel at playing the game, of course, one must rely on Abilities like Expression, Performance and Subterfuge (but Politics is how best to use them).

- Novice: You're a part-time or armchair political activist or analyst.
- • Practiced: You were a political science major or small time politician.
- ••• Competent: You might be a political analyst/commentator.
- •••• Expert: You can hold a national political office.
- •••• Master: You can move through the highest political circles in the world.

Possessed by: Activists, Lawyers, Politicians, Plotters Specialties: Bribes, City, Federal, International, State, Radical

SCIENCE

"Hand me that beaker," the chemist told John and put on a pair of thick rubber gloves.

John obeyed, walking quickly over to the chemist who was studying something under a microscope. "What's in it?" John asked, equally curious and impatient.

"Shit" the chemist said. "Everything's in here. This pigment seems heavy on the iodine, pseudoephedrine, acetone... all the shit you'd expect in crystal meth."

"But?" John asked.

"But, there's another compound I can't identify. Flakes of... something. I'll need to run some more tests."

This Knowledge represents a learned understanding of the basic physical sciences: Biology, chemistry, physics, etc. Most characters have a particular specialty upon which they focused their studies, but they still retain a broad understanding of the general principles of the other sciences. To use this Ability, the Storyteller will assign the difficulty for recalling a particular scientific fact or solving a science-oriented mystery, according to the complexity of the task. Note that Science is theoretical; Crafts and Technology cover some of the practical applications.

- Novice: You did well in high school science classes.
- • Practiced: You have a good view and practical experience of the sciences.
- • Competent: You've done your own research and experiments in the field.
- •••• Expert: You're a skilled researcher with a deep understanding of the sciences.
- •••• Master: Scientists the world over read your theories and research.

Possessed by: Academics, Engineers, Researchers, Scientists, Technicians

Specialties: Biology, Chemistry, Geology, Nuclear, Physics, etc.

BACKGROUNDS

Throughout a character's life, she acquires contacts, material possessions and social status. Even in death, she gains certain "considerations" by virtue of her connection to the living. These aren't things she learned or for which she trained. They stem from her past and often come about through a bit of luck. Backgrounds cover everything from friends to the role that fate holds for a character, and they have direct ties to a character's history, helping you flesh her out. As a player assigns points to Backgrounds, she helps define the character's exact personality, for Backgrounds offer a more detailed portrait of one's history.

There are two types of Backgrounds in Orpheus: normal Backgrounds (available to all characters) and Orpheus Backgrounds (available to Orpheus members). Characters belonging to Orpheus begin the game with two dots in Orpheus Backgrounds, in addition to the two dots in normal Backgrounds that all characters receive. Storytellers, however, may also dictate that working for companies such as Terrel & Squib or NextWorld offer the same benefits, and thus two company Backgrounds as well.

Orpheus Backgrounds: Arsenal, Detective License, Health Insurance, Patron, Personal Trainer, Status.

Normal Backgrounds: Allies, Artifact, Contacts, Destiny, Influence, Memorial, Mentor, Reincarnate, Resources.

Orpheus has powerful ties and connections to other organizations throughout the world, and as a result they can provide their agents with opportunities and advantages. The six Orpheus Backgrounds all reflect the extra benefits Orpheus provides, but just because something is listed as an Orpheus Background doesn't mean other characters can't have something similar in their history. Orpheus, for example, isn't the only corporation offering employees insurance. The Health Insurance Background, however, means that Orpheus will cover the unusual incidents that characters encounter. A character may also purchase guns and start a collection. That's fine, but the same character with the Orpheus Background: Arsenal won't have to do all the legwork. Contact with Orpheus opens opportunities for characters to acquire multiple firearms and ammo with little expense. If the player purchases Arsenal, the character won't have to work to maintain the Background unless, of course, he dies.

NORMAL BACKGROUNDS

There's nothing normal about "normal" Backgrounds in Orpheus. Some Backgrounds have supernatural aspects, and all of them can be valuable for a character. The important thing to remember is that Backgrounds should help define and be defined by your character's history, not as an extension of manipulating the system.

YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU

Technically, ghosts can't take Arsenal, Detective License, Health Insurance, Personal Trainer or Resources, unless it's a commodity they acquired in life that others can use. A ghost may have collected an Arsenal in life, for example, to which other characters can gain access. The reality, however, is that since ghosts can "manifest" and pass themselves off as alive for as long as the Vitality is flowing, they can still use their Arsenal, Detective License and Resources with a bit of ingenuity. They certainly can't carry anything around with them as spooks, but they can ask an ally to carry their detective license, gun or credit card until they manifest. The trick here is in ensuring that the character's death was never officially recorded. That way the estate doesn't divide up the Resources, and grieving relatives don't sell off the Arsenal cache that they discover in your home.

Unfortunately, these Backgrounds are no longer self-replenishing through the character's influence or presence. They will depreciate and eventually run dry during the chronicle unless the character uses his Allies to manage his belongings or makes a concerted effort to ensure that certain Backgrounds remain active. In the example of the Arsenal, each time characters use the weapons and equipment, the rating may drop by a dot at the Storyteller's discretion if the character doesn't maintain it. Resources are more difficult since the character can no long hold down a job, unless he has a special arrangement with Orpheus. In any event, Health Insurance and Personal Trainer are just unavailable to ghosts. They have, instead, Memorial and Reincarnate, which projectors may never take.

ALLIES

Craig manifested, then picked up the phone and dialed the FBI station head. A team of operatives was in trouble, caught in a firefight with a well-armed drug lord and his thugs. The police didn't have the firepower to stop the shoot out, even if they arrived in time. Nick answered the phone.

"You're not on a secure line," Nick said.

"Sorry, Nick... I've got trouble. I need a hostage-rescue team and any other resources available to stop an ongoing firefight at 40^{th} and Main. Details later."

"For you, no problem. The cavalry is on the way."

Allies are people who help and support you, either out of love or for their own reasons. They can be old friends from life before Orpheus or organizations with ties to you. They may have skills of their own, but more often they have influence in their community with resources beyond your own. Allies are generally trustworthy, but the relationship is a two-way street. If you neglect them, then they will be less likely to aid you, and while Allies don't necessarily know the truth about Orpheus or the hereafter, they may have their suspicions. No matter what, however, these are the people who are there for you. What are friends for, anyway?

Before the game, players should determine who their allies are with the Storyteller, as well as their relationship to the character. How do you know these people? Did you go to school with the local FBI chief? Did you date a top scientist back in high school?

- X You're a definite loner.
- One ally of moderate power and influence (a doctor, a police officer).
- Two allies of moderate power (a local politician, a crime reporter).
- Three allies, one with great influence (newspaper editor, wealthy real estate investor).
- Four allies, one of them very influential (city mayor, star athlete, military base commander).
- Five allies, one of them extremely influential (governor, TV star, general).

ARSENAL

Ben knew his team would encounter trouble on this latest mission. He looked down at his pistol. It wasn't going to be enough for this job. He needed something with range and punch.

Ben unlocked his closet door, a window on his more violent past that revealed over a dozen firearms on the wall. Ben calmly reached for his favorite... an assault rifle with laser targeting. This should do the trick, Ben thought. Even if the mob boss had an armored car, it still wouldn't stop this baby's armor piercing shots.

You have at your disposal weapons and equipment, particularly relevant to your work with Orpheus. If you need some hardware that you don't own, you can obtain it, legally or illegally, through your connections. This provides a character with access to heavy firepower and gear, like night-vision goggles or SWAT body armor, but bear in mind that anyone with this hardware is likely on Orpheus' go-to list for black bag operations.

- X You aren't even sure how to buy a gun.
- 1 Modest gun collection.
- 2 Substantial firearms, including rifles, shotguns, pistols and other items like police scanners.
- 3 Serious weapons collector with military surplus items, including military camouflage gear and night-vision binoculars.

- 4 Gun Show Regular, able to open a booth at any local gun show with weapons like assault rifles, sniper rifles and possibly a heavy weapon.
- 5 ATF Nightmare! You can get your hands on just about anything up to a tank.

ARTIFACT

Chet Mason knew where the Spectre was hiding. The other projectors, those kids, called for a retreat, but Chet knew better, just like in 'Nam. Suddenly, he felt a sidearm materialize in his hands... still didn't know where the damn thing came from, though. Chet didn't care much either. He aimed and filled the Spectre's darkened alcove with gauze bullets. The creature shrieked, plasm holes punching through its form. Chet kept firing.

Somehow the character finds himself in possession of a lost item or object of power that materializes in gauze form when he needs it. Orpheus researchers know that some artifacts appear to have supernatural powers, while others are simply useful by virtue of their function (like a gun that fires an endless supply of gauze bullets). By all accounts, however, the artifact was once real before its destruction but possessed enough of a psychic investment by its owners (or victims) that it still exists in gauze form. Characters with this Background possess a single artifact of power, with the artifact's potency increasing according to the number of dots assigned to the Background. Storytellers are the ultimate authority on artifacts and the extent of their powers, though a safe rule of thumb is that each dot in the Background represents an equivalent die in effect. Artifacts appear only to ghosts and projected entities, and they never appear to the living, nor do they affect the living, even in the hands of a manifesting ghost.

- X You don't have any artifact.
- 1 You have a small artifact, like the spiritual version of a mundane, melee weapon.
- 2 Your artifact is of moderate power, possibly a good luck charm.
- This level of artifact could be a mystical weapon like a holy blade or blessed bullets.
- 4 An artifact of this power level may have multiple minor abilities or one kickass major power.
- 5 You possess a powerful talisman, something with international fame or notoriety.

CONTACTS

Annie read the mission report over the unsuspecting secretary's shoulder. Something caught her eye about the relic smugglers, a record of phone calls to Columbia. Annie smiled. She hadn't talked to Consuela for ages, not since that incident in the Amazon, and it was unlikely Consuela had heard about Annie's death. She might know someone who

knew about charter flights from Columbia. Four hours later, Consuela called back with the name of the airstrip. It's good to have friends across the globe, Annie thought before returning to ghost form.

Characters with Contacts have direct access to information, and while they aren't as reliable or trustworthy as allies, they are well informed. And what they don't know, they can find out. Contacts are essentially the shortcut to research. By calling on contacts, a character can glean information that he usually needs within a few hours. He may spend a few dollars or promise a favor or two in the process, but the character will end up with the required information.

Each dot represents a primary contact, though if these acquaintances are unavailable, the character may still find other information networks. Players must determine the identity of a character's primary contacts with the Storyteller. For any rolls involving Contacts, a player should roll Manipulation + Contacts.

- X When you need information, you ask someone else to find it.
- 1 One primary contact.
- 2 Two primary contacts.
- 3 Three primary contacts.
- 4 Four primary contacts.
- 5 Five primary contacts.

DESTINY

Dr. Anderson looked at the charts. "Tom, with your history, I'm surprised you made it this long."

Tom smiled sadly. "Doctor, it's been a hard fight."

Dr. Anderson checked the previous MRIs, noting the progression of Tom's disease. "I wouldn't have given you a chance, based on four of these charts. Yet, you're still here. Hmmm... you're lucky. That bullet just strayed across your forehead last night."

Tom sighed. "I sure don't feel lucky, doc."

Some people have a particular role to play in a life. They are destined for a higher purpose, possibly leading to a heroic sacrifice or terrible tragedy. Characters with this Background live under the protection of this "charmed life," heading relentlessly on their path to their ultimate fate. For each point of Destiny, a character's player may re-roll one die roll per session. The player may only re-roll a set of dice once, however; the second result stands.

- X Your life isn't run by some mystical force.
- 1 One re-roll.
- 2 Two re-rolls.
- Three re-rolls.
- 4 Four re-rolls.
- Five re-rolls.

DETECTIVE LICENSE

Kate walked to the counter and slipped a piece of paper forward.

"There's an irregularity with the file," she said to the clerk.

The clerk typed in the account number, then hesitated after the information appeared on the screen. "This isn't your file," he said. "Can I see some ID?"

Kate flashed her PI license and offered her best smile. "I need the owner's current address."

"Hold on, let me call my manager."

Kate smiled and waited while the clerk walked through Annie, who was reading the screen over the clerk's shoulder; he vanished into the back room. Annie spoke, but only Kate heard her.

"I have the scumbag's Social Security number... it begins 525."

"New Mexico," Kate said with a smile.

Orpheus offers detective licenses to any agent willing to undergo the training. This allows Orpheus to investigate matters publicly and legally, thus giving its agents legitimacy. Orpheus uses its many contacts to bypass some of the more difficult requirements of obtaining a license, like potentially thousands of hours working in a private investigative service or three years without a criminal record. Anyone with Detective License can access information for investigative or research purposes. This reduces by one per dot the difficulty of an Investigation roll, indicating he's pursuing various leads or information channels. This bonus only applies at a rate of one against the difficulty for every hour the character spends investigating (up to this Background's maximum dots). Additionally, the information must be accessible in some capacity. DMV records are, but NSA-classified information is not.

- X You haven't pursued the training.
- 1 You have the license but probably don't deserve it.
- 2 You know the basics and the license is earning you the experience.
- The police respect your work.
- Everyone wants to know when you're going to apply to the FBI or CIA.
- 5 You're a modern day Sherlock Holmes.

HEALTH INSURANCE

Ben Cotton stared at the check and grinned. Who had ever heard of people paying you after you got hurt? If he'd had a policy like this one in the old days, he would've bought out Bill Gates. No wonder people liked working here, with all the cancer survivors and daredevils running around. Ben figured he'd heal up a bit more at home and keep the change. Maybe he could convince them to pay in advance for the next two years....

Most companies provide Health Insurance, but with Orpheus agents it means a little more. Orpheus

covers the cost of medical expenses, regardless what incurs the injury, and offers large payments upon death of the insured party, which are paid out annually. Considering the range of potential injuries characters receive in the line of duty, Health Insurance is a necessity. Amusingly, Health Insurance covers many things, including extended Beach time, massages and other "character" luxuries for the benefit of preventative treatment (offering characters vacations and small considerations to head off physical or mental breakdowns). Essentially, Orpheus treats health concerns with a holistic approach... preventing the problems before they arise.

- You elected not to take out insurance or you haven't been with the company that long.
- You have basic coverage; \$50,000 in life insurance, massages every two-weeks, a free weekend at a local spa once a year and two weeks personal time. You also earn a \$3,000 dollar bonus annually if you survive the year without requiring hospitalization.
- You have universal coverage, including \$150,000 in life insurance, massages once a week, two free weekends at a local spa and two weeks personal time. You also earn a \$5,000 bonus annually if you survive the year without requiring hospitalization.
- Your health insurance is almost an investment. You have \$500,000 in life insurance and make a \$10,000 annual bonus if you survive the year without hospitalization. You also earn weekly massages, three free spa weekends and three weeks personal time.
- You have enough health insurance to call in an emergency airlift for yourself due to injury during a mission. You carry \$2 million in life insurance and earn a \$20,000 annual bonus for avoiding hospitalization. You also have bi-weekly massages, a week in any resort in the Western Hemisphere and three weeks personal time. At this level, however, you are either a celebrity agent with public appearances, running black ops missions or bringing Orpheus a constant stream of new clients.
 - Rare anti-venom needed? No problem. Hyperbaric chamber? Piece of cake. If there's a treatment available, you can get it and more. Your life insurance is worth over \$10 million, while your annual bonus is \$50,000 a year. In addition to the biweekly massages and two-week vacation to any resort in the world, you also receive three weeks personal time. At this level, you're damn near a spokesman for Orpheus or one of their most effective wetworks agents.

5

INFLUENCE

"But we have invitations," Ben Cotton said, growing noticeably angry.

"I'll handle this," offered Zoë, tossing back her shoulderlength dark hair, "but remember... this is the exception, not the rule." She sauntered up to the guard, flashing her baby blues. The security guard raised an eyebrow before realization lit up his face.

"Zoë Vitt! I remember when you set yourself on fire and nearly killed yourself. I didn't even know you were still alive. Wow! Can I get your autograph for my daughter?"

Zoë smiled. "Only if we can go inside." The guard pushed the door open wide.

Influence measures a character's power in society. Influence is rarely an overnight phenomenon, but instead requires years to cultivate. People follow the lead of a character with Influence as long as they believe the individual is working in their best interests. If a character uses Influence to push a group to act contrary to their nature, he'll encounter problems and possibly lose some Influence. Players and Storytellers should agree on the exact nature of a character's Influence. A well-respected gang member might stop a riot but have no chance of talking his way into CIA headquarters.

- X You're just another face in the crowd.
- 1 You look like an authority on matters and your name or title sounds important.
- A few movers and shakers consider you an acquaintance.
- 3 People know your name and take you seriously.
- 4 You are one of society's notables.
- 5 You held high political office or have the power to create trends.

MEMORIAL

Annie wanted so badly to manifest, to wrap her arms around her parents and quiet the tears flowing freely down their faces. She wanted to offer them succor, but they believed her dead and her return would only bring them more anguish. Instead, Annie stood behind her parents and watched them unveil her bust at the new wing of the library, the Annie Harper Wing, made possible by her parent's donations. That's when it struck Annie: the swell of their memories, a surge of warm electricity that suffused her chest and spread throughout her body like whiskey on a cold day. Annie's parent missed her dearly, but their memories of her drove them to better the lives of others; their memorial empowered her, infusing her gauze with angelic cast.

Good begets good. Memorial is more than just the memories of the living invigorating the dead; Memorial reflects one's positive impact upon the lives of others and how that good spreads. This Background represents the positive influences the character exerted over people in his life, the ones that drive friends and family left behind

to accomplish a greater, selfless good in honor of the character's memory. Memorial can be anything, from plaques and statuary commemorating a location named after the character, to pictures at a makeshift shrine to even a simple legacy of one person naming his daughter after the character because of her actions. The qualifier is that the Memorial must celebrate the character by perpetuating good will or by benefiting others. In exchange, the character's player can draw upon this positive vibe each session to reinvigorate himself with Vitality.

- X Sure you're remembered, but not enough to have positively influenced people.
- Whether for a photo someone carries to give him strength or for someone naming her child after you, you can regain one Vitality.
- You were known in your community. Several people remember you enough to donate money to your favorite charity in your name or even place your name on the AIDS quilt; regain two Vitality each session.
- You achieved citywide recognition. Your name and actions are in print somewhere, inspiring others to better lives. Regain three Vitality each session.
- You have a nationwide legacy. People built you a memorial, one that honors you by helping others. You regain four Vitality each session.
- The anniversary of your death is a day of mourning for many people, and your actions still serve as a beacon of hope. With this almost international recognition, you gain five Vitality each session.

MENTOR

"I can't deal with this anymore!" Conrad said, shouting his frustration. "Doesn't anyone understand what it's like out there?"

Chet, looked straight at him. "Come with me," he said. Conrad followed, despite himself. This was his first week with Orpheus, and no one seemed to really understand. "Let me tell you something, kid," Chet said, in a voice that was harsh and comforting at the same time, "Nobody really understands what it's like for anyone else out there, but if you want to talk, I'll listen." The veteran stared the rookie in the eye.

You have a friend in the business, a more experienced Orpheus operative or ghost who decided to take you under his wing. Mentors provide advice and assistance, helping characters move up in the world whether out of love or a sense of responsibility. They may be trying to find a replacement so they can move on to other things, or they sympathize with the character (seeing themselves in the misfortunes of the young and inexperienced). Mentors make demands of characters, asking them to go on missions or testing them with challenges, though characters should always end up

learning from a mentor. Unlike a patron, a mentor cares about the character and understands the challenges he faces. Mentors teach characters new Abilities, can help them toward new Backgrounds or even learning a Horror. It is not within the mentor's interests, however, to simply hand the character new experiences on a silver platter. In this capacity, a mentor is a Storyteller's tool to guiding the character into situations that'll teach him the important lessons. Please note, however, that while mentors are teachers, they can't teach what they don't know. For convenience's sake, assume the mentor is capable of teaching or imparting most Traits up to a character's dots in this Background. Thus, generally, a one-dot Mentor Background will teach only up to one dot in any Trait the character is studying. This doesn't reflect the mentor's range of expertise, but rather, the mentor's interest level with the character. Mentors can also offer advice when the Storyteller needs to feed the players information.

- You gain experience the hard way, through your own mistakes.
- 1 A distant or unimportant mentor.
- 2 Helpful but eccentric mentor.
- 3 Notable mentor with time.
- 4 Well-respected mentor.
- 5 Powerful and influential mentor.

PATRON

"Blink, my boy, damn good to see you," the senator said, pumping John's hand in his viselike grip.

"Easy on my livelihood, senator," John joked.

The senator headed into the next room, nearly dragging John with him. "Blink, I need your help. Someone on my staff is leaking information to the press, and I need to find out who. So, if you could do your magic, I'd appreciate it."

John shook his head and chuckled. "I'm not sure I know that particular trick...."

The senator fumbled in his pockets. "Aha, and Blink, as incentive, here's a bit of spending money, and uh, when I find them, the keys to my mansion."

John grinned. "These keys, sir?" he said, holding up the keys.

"Exactly!" responded the senator. "Treat the mansion as your own for the next two weeks. Enjoy the Jacuzzi. Consider it payment in advance."

A patron is a specific individual who contacts the character for help, hires her for assignments and protects her when possible. In exchange, the patron returns the character's help through various rewards, paying her money, giving her temporary contacts to use, places to hide, some weapons, etc. The patron offers a character a fluid barter system, limited only by the character's willingness to do work and the affluence of the patron. Thus, a Patron Background might supply the character



with an equivalent level in Allies, Arsenal, Contacts, Resources, etc. for the current mission only. Storytellers can also mix-and-match the patron's benefits, offering a dot here and there on condition they don't cumulatively exceed this Background's tiers in dots.

- X You keep clients at a safe distance.
- You have a patron with a small business who is willing to provide what he can, particularly in his field. He is known within his community.
- Your patron has money and influence, plus a few homes and businesses to call her own. She is a known figure within the city.
- Your patron has significant contacts as well as resources, spread out over a large area multiple businesses, for example. He is known throughout the state or province.
- When your patron calls, people listen. She is one of society's movers and shakers, capable of ruining lives with a single phone call. Your patron has national recognition.
- You have a contact with one of the wealthiest, most powerful people in the country, if not internationally. He's a spider at the center of a large web of resources and influence.

PERSONAL TRAINER

"Ready to become a hacker extraordinaire?" Nicolette asked.

"Yes," Tom said, "I need to know everything I can about computer security."

"Okay," Nicolette said "I'm glad to have you, but I won't pull any punches."

Tom cleared his throat. "I'm glad you're teaching me," he said. "I really appreciate this specialized training."

"No problem," Nicolette said. "But in my classroom, there are no sick days or vacations. I teach you till you get it or drop out."

"Great," Tom said, suddenly worried.

A personal trainer works with a character to improve her physique, techniques (such as Melee or Brawl) or aptitudes (Athletics, Drive, etc.). A personal trainer is different from someone you grab at the gym or an ordinary Orpheus instructor because the trainer is usually out of house. He knows your strengths and weaknesses and can help you target your soft spots or vulnerabilities. In fact, the training is all personalized and geared toward your assets and capabilities. For each dot in Personal Trainer, your character can target one Attribute or Ability, purchasing a Trait for one less experience point (2 points instead of 3) or minus 1 to a multiplier (current rating x 3 for Attributes and current rating x1 for Abilities). To gain this, however, the character must allocate at least one hour per day for training for each dot or Trait he wants to improve. Otherwise, he doesn't gain the bonus.

Additionally, the player must tell the Storyteller what he's trying to accomplish, instead of springing it on the Storyteller at the last minute.

- X You prefer learning on your own.
- 1 A personal trainer focusing on a single Attribute or Ability.
- 2 A trainer capable of instructing you in two separate areas.
- This trainer is well versed in three areas.
- 4 Your personal trainer can help you concentrate on improving four different Traits.
- You've got your own guru, capable of instructing you in many different Traits.

REINCARNATE

"Why is it so far-fetched?" Annie asked.

Ben shrugged. "It just is. I mean, like... why does everyone who claims they've been reincarnated say they once ruled Atlantis."

"I know several million Buddhists who'd disagree with that statement, including me."

"You're Buddhist?"

"When it comes to reincarnation, yeah I am. I fact, I can even draw on my previous experiences sometimes."

"Bullshit! How's it you can remember your past lives, but not Tom or me here?"

Annie shrugged, a sad crooked smile on her gauze lips. "Because I'm dead... remember?"

Many cultures believe in reincarnation, and whether or not your character does, his death has opened up more memories than he should rightly have. How he deals with such revelations is up to the player, but regardless, because death lays ghosts bare the filtering effects of flesh, their dormant memories of past lives resurface in images, impulses and, sometimes, even passing familiarity with matters the character never realized he knew. This allows him to draw upon previous experiences to assist him in Ability rolls for this one instance. The dots in this Background operate as a free dice pool, which the player may use each game session to supplement his existing dice pool or even roll on Abilities he doesn't normally possess. One caveat in this matter, however, is for Storytellers regarding players who use the Background to jump around the scene and intrude on everyone else's specialties. The Storyteller may rule instead that each dot in the Background represents one predetermined Ability that the character may draw from at a one dot effect, thereby restricting the player from stepping on everyone's toes.

- X You remember nothing of past lives or have never experienced them.
- You have hunches that allow you to draw upon one additional die.

- 2 You remember quick flashes that allow you to draw upon two additional dice.
- You see enough to remember some past friends, and you even know their names. This allows you to draw upon three additional dice.
- 4 You remember portions of your past life the way an adult remembers his early childhood. This enables you to draw upon four additional dice.
- 5 You remember everything like an adult remembering Elementary or High School, and can draw on five additional dice.

RESOURCES

Hoyt Masterson casually walked over. "Problem?" he asked in his easygoing Southern manner.

"Yeah," muttered a manifest Craig. "Damn thing doesn't want to work."

The rental van made a terrible noise. Hoyt nodded, "You should always let me drive. Pop the hood, Craig." Hoyt looked under the hood, as Craig stepped out. He slammed the hood shut. "She's a goner. I'll be back."

Craig watched Hoyt walk across the street to the car dealership. Fifteen minutes later, Hoyt drove back in a sports car.

"Shelby Mustang," Hoyt said, "possibly the greatest car in American history. Gives Chevy drivers a bad day."

Craig looked at the car. It seemed a bit old. "Is this a new rental?" he asked.

"Nope," Hoyt answered. "Bought her for myself with a bit of pocket change."

This describes your personal financial resources and access to those resources. It reflects your standard of living rather than liquid assets, and even if you have enough dots for a million dollars, it may take weeks or months for you to come up with hundreds of thousands in cash. Of course, Orpheus pays its agents, but if you want more than the agency provides, it's best to have a few dots in this Background. Please note, however, that Resources not only implies having money and owning property, it also means having some way of maintaining that capital.

- X You live paycheck to paycheck.
- 1 Small savings. In a pinch, you could draw up a \$1,000 in cash, possibly from a 401k. You have an extra \$500 to spend in a month.
- 2 Middle class. You have a condominium and a car. You could liquidate for close to \$10,000 in a pinch. You have \$1,500 extra spending money a month.
- 3 Large savings. Maybe you got lucky or just invested well, but regardless, you're a homeowner with equity. You can liquidate and come up with around \$50,000 cash. You have \$2,500 extra to spend a month.

- Well off. Money's not an issue for you. You belong to an exclusive country club and have a nice mansion and vacation home. You can spend \$10,000 a month without any effort and can liquidate to the tune of five million.
- Fabulous wealth. You'd have to check with an accountant to determine your real net worth, but you report several millions to the IRS each year. You could get your hands on over a million dollars within a week and casually spend \$30,000 a month without noticing.

STATUS

Kate Dennison walked into the briefing room, punctual as always, but before she could sit, the briefing officer started walking out.

"There's no time for a briefing. I have another meeting to figure out what happened with one of the teams."

Kate looked at him. "What happened?"

The officer looked at her and shrugged. "We need to check protocols before sending anyone to investigate."

Kate narrowed her eyes. "Are they in danger?"

The officer nodded.

"Sit down and tell me where they are," she said.

"You're not cleared—" he began.

"Don't be an asshole. Sit down... please," she said.

The officer sat.

Some people command more authority in Orpheus than others. Status is a measure of clout within the company. For some characters, it stems from rank, while for others it's a degree of admiration; a well-respected agent, for example, may have more Status within the company than his immediate superior. Status also reaches beyond Orpheus' boundaries to special clients and other organizations. If an agent has Status, he may call in special one-time "favors" from previous clients or groups outside of Orpheus, as well as receiving more assistance from within the company. Status dots add to any Social rolls involving Orpheus members, and may help when "officially" dealing with other organizations.

- X Do you have a guest pass?
- 1 Newbie or rookie, though a few people have heard of you.
- Accomplished operative; everyone knows your name if not your face.
- Respected veteran; everyone knows you and tries staying on your good side.
- Essential personnel; when you have an opinion, it goes to the highest levels.
- 5 You are Orpheus.

One of the most important mechanics in any **Orpheus** game, for any **Orpheus** character, is a Trait

called Vitality. It is the quantified (and simplified) measurement of a given character's strength of soul and presence among the living. It encapsulates a number of important aspects of one's identity, including that intangible quality defining someone's core being. As a single concept, it is a broad and critical one, drawing together a character's memories, emotional resonance and depth of personality into one Trait (which defines both incorporeal physique as well as the energy fueling a spirit's actions). Vitality is a ghost's or sleeper's body, and whatever damage the spook endures is deducted from his Vitality rating.

Vitality is important not only to the character himself, but for his dealings with others. The less Vitality a ghost or projected entity possesses, the fewer connections he has to the living by virtue of missing key components to his own persona. Death can be a soul-shredding experience, and those ghosts who do not progress to some final reward (whatever it may be) are left behind — trapped among the living. The pain of being ripped from one's own body and then forsaken in this sort of Limbo often squeezes Vitality from the soul, leaving one a hollow shell of her once vibrant personality. Thus, those with missing or handicapped Vitality (like drones and blips) fixate on those memories or states of existence that still provide them with some sense of identity. They are the "broken records" of the restless dead, those who repeat the same set of actions or haunt the same place because it is all they remember of their own past.

Very few ghosts actually have Vitality ratings over five, which makes the characters unique and highly sought after. Those ghosts with ratings at one are those quick, snapshot ghosts you see caught in the moment of their deaths (drones). Rating two and three ghosts (blips) are more like distant echoes, repeating sequences of events over and over again but having some sense of self outside their deaths. Some don't even know they're dead, but they react violently if confronted. Those at four or five are far more self-aware, enough to fight Spectres actively or serve as interesting supporting characters.

Just because a character's Vitality drops below five doesn't mean he's like other ghosts. It's not his current rating that defines him as a projector or ghost, but his potential for accruing up to 10 Vitality that matters. Think of it as emotional states with a one rating encompassing utter depression (or anger, or frustration), a five rating indicating ambivalence, and a 10 rating signifying utter euphoria. Most ghosts can't exceed their rating of one to five, and are potentially trapped in a state of ambivalence or increasingly despondent emotions the lower they are in Vitality. They can experience brief moments of joy or satisfaction, for example, but they will rarely be truly happy because their Vitality rating acts as an emotional ceiling. It's their nature to be morose, and they will fall back to that existence as

their default nature. The characters, however, experience happiness, joy and the gamut of emotions because they have the entire range of passions available to them; their ceiling is 10, not their current rating. That's what makes them special. This includes hues, who may be more despondent than most characters but are blessed with a wider emotional array.

STARTING VITALITY

Just like Willpower, the Vitality Trait measures from one to 10, but will likely fluctuate even more wildly during gameplay. One must keep track of both current Vitality as well as what is known as starting Vitality. Starting Vitality represents the overall consistent level of a character's strength of spirit. Infusions of Vitality can temporarily raise a character's Vitality above its starting cap (think of it as spiritual gluttony), but a character may *naturally* heal only up to the level of his starting Vitality. This cap represents a soul inherent, vibrant nature, not how "luminous" it can potentially become (Vitality peaks at 10 for all characters).

One's Shade and Nature both help determine starting Vitality — the two factors that, together, compose the core of a character's persona as a ghost or projected entity. Each Shade has a starting Vitality rating (between 4 and 6), which is added to the Vitality modifier granted by the character's chosen Nature. The sum total is the character's starting Vitality, which may not exceed nine points for characters (seven for hues).

Example: Ben's Shade is Poltergeist and his nature is Critic. Being a Poltergeist means he has a Base Vitality 5. According to the list of Natures, being a Critic means that Ben adds one to that, giving him a starting Vitality 6. Because he's a Poltergeist Critic, however, Ben has a Spite rating 4 (two for Shade + two for Nature). He'll probably want to spend some Freebie Points raising his starting Vitality.

ALIVE OR DEAD

Given that Vitality represents a spook's entire being, it's only fitting that one's Vitality determine how a given character appears to others at any given time. Vitality not only reflects how "alive" a ghost or projecting entity feels, but how "alive" it looks to the living, as well. Low-Vitality spooks (like drones and blips) often manifest evidence of their own demise, or of terrible injuries. Victims of violence show grievous wounds, those who died of disease appear to be in the final stages of their illness, and drowning victims appear purple and bloated. The deterioration is directly proportional to the amount of Vitality a character possesses. A one-Vitality ghost who died of a gunshot wound, for example, resembles a walking corpse with a gaping, oozing hole in the back of his head.

By the same token, however, high-Vitality spooks often appear more alive than they ever did in life, and certainly more vibrant than other ghosts. In the eight to 10 Vitality range, characters seem like ordinary, healthy people and can even be warm to the touch when manifesting. Indeed, a 10-Vitality spooks would likely demonstrate an even greater blush of health than the majority of those still encased in flesh.

UNSEEN

Vitality is also important because it determines the general force of a ghost's or projected entity's spiritual presence. When a projector's spirit is safe within its living body, it is effectively invisible to the attentions of malevolent spiritual entities (or at least at no greater risk than anyone else living). When roaming free outside the body, however, a spook's presence and activities can draw the attention of Spectres and other things that go bump in the night. Vitality determines just how visible or invisible the character's soul is when in this state.

At seven or greater current Vitality (not starting Vitality), the ghost or projected entity is essentially "invisible" to Spectres and the like because he appears to be, for all intents and purposes, one of the living. This is not to say that a Spectre cannot find or see such a spook, merely that it mistakes the character for one of the many living, and therefore nothing extraordinary. It's a chameleon effect or misdirection, the same way zebras confuse predators with all their stripes when gathered in a herd. Only by attacking a Spectre or otherwise drawing significant attention to the fact that the character is, in fact, not one of the living can the character forfeit this concealment. Conversely, drones are often attracted to those with high Vitality (current points, not starting rating), since they, too, mistake them for the living (but living without the mortal flesh to diffuse their brilliance). The character's brightly shining presence intrudes on the drone's self-involved "loop," and it is all the ghost can do to break from its repetitious cycle to seek assistance from one of the "living" (many drones believe themselves still alive). This is not to say that drones will assail the character at every opportunity, but they will acknowledge the characters in a rare moment of lucidity.

Please note that because blips have higher Vitality scores than drones, they are more self-sufficient and less trapped by their existence loops. They see the characters as the crucible would each other, and can choose whether to interact with them or not.

At five or six current Vitality, a character is visible to both friendly and hostile entities (drones and Spectres) depending on what actions he takes. The effectiveness of his concealment, as it were, rests in the character's own Abilities. At four or fewer current Vitality, the character is just like any other ghost — visible to Spectres. He must tread carefully now, but he is also invisible to drones, who simply mistake him as indistinguishable background noise. In this state, the character has less of

a chance interacting with said ghosts, so the player must add one to the difficulty of any Social-based attempts when interacting with a drone.

CREATING NEW CHARACTERS

Ghosts and projectors can create a new ghost for their crucible, someone capable of being as powerful as they are and not just another elevated drone or blip. The crucible must share a common link through their ability to lend Vitality to one another (which creates a strong bond between them), enabling them to pool powers and resources. By choosing a ghost with a Vitality 4 or 5, the crucible can focus their own Vitality in one shot to create an empowered ghost. The crucible designates one character to act as their conduit, channeling 40 Vitality through her into the target. The conduit, in turn, burns one Willpower rating permanently (which will return only through the spending of experience points), suffusing the target with a jolt of Vitality, thus altering its metaphysical state. This means the characters can create "offspring" and allies (and potential thralls/ slaves/lovers/etc.), though the process does not bind them into service. The process to creating projectors is actually simpler, and merely requires that the crucible locate someone with multiple near-death experiences and train them to project as a skimmer or sleeper.

EMPOWERING HORRORS

The power of a character's spirit is what drives him in all his endeavors, and the supernatural abilities of his ghostly form are no exception. Vitality powers a characters' Horrors, and it is the amount of Vitality invested within them that makes them as innocuous or as dangerous as they are. All Horrors have a zero-Vitality cost effect, which is simply the character exerting his mastery over his ability into the area around him. Once he dumps Vitality into the effort, however, the potential (and possibly the results) increase dramatically. Each Horror has a different effect for each amount of Vitality invested into it. A one-Vitality effect might be only slightly more powerful than the zero-cost effect, while a five-Vitality effect (often the highest) can produce some spectacular results.

VITALITY SHARING

Due to its fluid nature, Vitality can pass from spook to spook provided the ghosts and projected entities spend two weeks acquainting themselves with one another. At this stage, lending Vitality to a crucible member takes only a moment, but it must be a free exchange on the part of the donor and the two characters must be in contact. Taking Vitality by force is a whole other kettle of fish (see Replenishing Vitality below) and not something a spook should do to his crucible-mates if he wishes to continue working with them.

In addition to acting as a group resource tactic, freely sharing Vitality with one's crucible has the added effect of generating a spiritual link between each member. After an additional month of sharing and donating Vitality to members of his crucible, the character becomes linked to his allies from that point onward. The primary advantage to this is that the characters may then donate and receive Vitality without establishing contact — so long as they can see each other. This then allows the crucible to coordinate their efforts via Horror usage and Benefits (See p. 99 for more).

REGAINING VITALITY

Given its importance as the (arguably) most important Trait in **Orpheus**, it is equally important for players to understand how characters can recover Vitality and under what circumstances. There are, in fact, several ways in which characters can regain Vitality during gameplay.

• Although ghosts aren't exactly "of the living," that's not to say that they don't heal from wounds just like living creatures. For every eight hours of rest the character ghost or projected sleeper receives (with no combat or Horror usage), he regains a single point of Vitality. If this rest is interrupted, it may be later resumed without forcing the character's soul to start from square one — unless the character suffered a Vitality loss (of even one point) at some point during the interruption. In this case, the clock on the period of rest resets and begins anew.

FEARFUL SYMMETRY

Due to the universal importance of Vitality as the driving force of the spirit world, its very ebb and flow is woven into the fabric of ghostly reality. Whenever the character spends significant amounts of Vitality in one moment, the event registers on the periphery of all nearby spirits' senses (within a three-block radius). Any character spending three or more Vitality in a single turn for any reason (powering a Horror, revitalizing a drone, etc.) registers as a "plip" on the radar of nearby ghosts and Spectres; some may simply ignore the matter, or approach the area for a closer examination (Storyteller prerogative). Any character spending five Vitality or more in a single turn, however, will draw local ghosts and Spectres from a five-block radius, since so very few entities possess this range of power.

Thus, it is wise to avoid grandiose displays of Vitality, lest a character find himself face to face with a newly arrived and hungry Spectre...

This form of healing cannot bring a spook above its starting Vitality cap.

- Characters may also regain Vitality through their shared link with the crucible's members. Comrades can share Vitality with one another (on a purely voluntary basis), up to the standard maximum of 10 points, potentially taking characters above their starting Vitality caps (save for the hue, which can never exceeds its cap). If a character donates a point of Vitality in this way, he cannot simply retrieve it whenever he likes; once it is accepted, the recipient must voluntarily return the favor. Note that the act of donating Vitality does attract Spectres.
- As a quick but effective fix, characters can spend one Willpower point (as a reflexive action) to immediately shoot a boost of three Vitality into their souls. This ability is an indication that the character's body and psyche are unified concepts, for all intents and purposes, where Willpower acts as pure adrenaline, supercharging the character's soul and invigorating him with a second wind.

No **Orpheus** character can perish so long as he has Willpower points remaining.

• Another (dangerous) way of recovering Vitality involves tapping into the character's negative side. By "tapping" Spite, the character draws on the bitterness, frustration and anger building in his soul to fuel to regain Vitality. Note that one never spends Spite points or rating (thus decreasing their value), but only taps them for their power. Unfortunately, tapping Spite only feeds Spite. It encourages it to grow and consume more of the character like a cancer. So a character with five Spite points who taps three Spite points still has five Spite points. The same is true for the Spite rating. A character, however, can never tap more Spite points than available in his pool. So someone with two Spite points can draw on those two only.

By tapping Spite points, a character may gain one Vitality on a one-for-one basis. If the character is in dire straits, he may tap one Spite rating (effectively tapping 10 Spite points, even though he rolls the one die for the rating). Doing so immediately skyrockets the character's Vitality to 10 — but at a potentially significant cost to his soul. Whenever the character taps Spite (be it points or rating), he must roll a number of dice equal to the number of points/rating tapped (difficulty 7). For every die resulting in a failure, the character gains a point/rating of Spite. For every botch rolled, the character gains two Spite points or ratings. Whenever a character's Spite rating increases by means of tapping Spite, he immediately gains a Stain per new Spite rating.

Example: Finding himself in dire straits, Ben's player decides to tap three Spite points to regain some quick (and dirty) Vitality. His player rolls three dice at difficulty 7, scoring 2, 5 and 8. Ben gains two Spite points for his temerity (a costly bit of Vitality, in this case), raising his current Spite

points to 7. Since he is still three points shy of 10, he gains neither a new Spite rating nor a new Stain.

- When in desperate circumstances, a character can also try robbing another spook of its Vitality and add that Vitality to his own (see Thievery, p. 151).
- Characters may also regain Vitality by helping ghosts find peace and transcendence. For more on this, see this chapter's Default Abilities, p. 148-151.
- The final method of Vitality recovery is open only to skimmers and, occasionally, sleepers (ones whose bodies are awake and active), who may regain Vitality by returning to their living bodies and resting. In this way, skimmers often serve their crucible as "batteries," charging up before sharing Vitality. Skimmers and sleepers regain Vitality at a rate of one per hour of rest, up to their starting Vitality.

HITTING ZERO VITALITY

Hitting zero Vitality is like reaching a state of utter exhaustion where the character can no longer move, regardless of the dangers to his existence. The best analogy would be Everest climbers who hit a point where they are so oxygen deprived and so cold that they hallucinate, or simply want to sit in the snow and sleep. Fortunately, zero Vitality is not as terminal as conditions on the slopes of Everest, but it can be dangerous if the ghost or projected entity is low on Willpower as well. In this instance, once any spook hits zero Vitality, self-preservation kicks in and expends an available Willpower point to bring your Vitality up to three. Once Willpower and Vitality both hit zero, for whatever reason, then most ghosts and projected entities dissipate. They perish, the gauze holding them unable to contain their essence or memories.

Notice the "most" comment? That's because some spooks (those with a normal cap of four Vitality or higher), have the mental wherewithal to tap Spite for Vitality, meaning a fortunate few might survive because they were "angry" enough to pull through. For others, tapping Spite means the character boards the bullet train to Spectrehood and doesn't look back. Still, some chance of survival is better than discorporating.

SPITE

Every **Orpheus** character has a negative, angry side. That malignancy has the potential to grow even stronger in characters than it does in others, due to the existences these extraordinary individuals lead. For those with multiple near-death experiences (and often violent pasts), the exposure to anger, bitterness, jealousy and frustration — all the things fueling one's malevolent nature — is arguably more extreme than it might be for ordinary people.

Spite represents the measure of a character's nasty side, the degree to which a character allowed his hate, insecurity and frustration to fester within his soul. It is the nasty inclinations that fill one's head with fantasies of revenge and anger, driving him from his own purity and, ultimately, transcendence. Whereas Spite is something everyone must reconcile with on a daily basis to function in society, it's a more difficult prospect for ghosts and projected entities because they exist as psychological expressions, emotional force constituting their body and dictating their strength of being.

Perhaps that is the single most important thing to remember about Spite... just as Vitality is integral to a spook's being, so too is Spite. All spooks have it; it's simply a matter of how they cope with its presence and strength. A spook can never be rid of it because it's an integral part of his identity, but neither is it a blessing. Spite grows with every nasty inconsideration one might actualize, like absorbing another spook's Vitality, and eventually, it can consume the consumer. Nastier still, ghosts and projected entities can draw upon the anger and hatred inherent in Spite for that extra push. That's what it's there for, after all. Remember, however, that drawing on this barely redeemable aspect of identity carries a price.

As a game mechanic, Spite is a two-tiered Trait, possessing both a long-term level (called Spite rating) and a fluid facet (Spite points). Characters can acquire both during game play as a result of particularly nasty actions (like draining spooks of Vitality) or by a process known as "tapping" Spite (see Regaining Vitality, page 191). In either case, each time a character acquires 10 Spite points, he gains one Spite rating. Thus, ridding oneself of Spite points is much easier than thinning one's Spite rating.

The lower a character's Spite rating, the more humane and virtuous he is at heart and the less consumed by his own bitterness and frustration. A ghost or projected entity with a Spite rating of 0 is a veritable saint, the Mother Teresa of the disembodied; a spook with a Spite rating of 9 is a malevolent fucker who would just as soon club Mother Teresa over the head with a baby seal as talk to her. Most **Orpheus** characters fall in the range between those numbers, and keeping a character's Spite rating low is (or should be) one of the driving goals of each player.

STARTING SPITE

A player determines his character's starting Spite rating as he would his starting Vitality. Each Shade includes a listing for Base Spite; that number is then added to the Spite modifier accompanying his chosen Nature. The sum of these two numbers is the character's starting Spite rating.

Unfortunately, characters can acquire Spite rather easily during game play. The saving grace to this, however, is that Spite is never summarily thrust upon the character for no good reason; a character's own Spite levels (whether points or rating) are more or less under his own control. All he has to do is carefully monitor both his own Spite levels and behavior. Sounds easy, right? And it is, at least in theory, but we all know what happens to the best-laid plans of mice and men....

As mentioned above (under Regaining Vitality), Spite can be "tapped" for its power in times of desperate need. In essence, the character is drawing on the raw strength of his own dark impulses to fuel his efforts, a sort of negative adrenaline. One can choose to tap either Spite points or Spite rating, the latter being the equivalent of tapping 10 Spite points. Tapping Spite (of either kind) will never reduce one's Spite, and indeed, may well raise it. Such are deals with the devil, however.

Now that we've established what a nasty customer Spite can be, one important question remains: Can a character ever rid himself of Spite, or is he destined to keep amassing it until it eventually consumes him? The answer is yes to the latter and no to the former; a ghost or projected entity *can* divest himself of Spite (both points and rating), but it ain't easy.

GOOD RIDDANCE

In Orpheus chronicles, the one and only surefire way to rid oneself of Spite is by fulfilling a purpose and freeing other ghosts from the torment of their existence here in limbo, thereby sending them to their final reward. Whenever a character uses Sever the Strand on another ghost, thereby freeing it of one of its tethers, he has the potential to lose Spite points or gain Vitality. Only the character directly connected to the ghost in question (by dint of Nature or Nature group, etc.) may benefit from this boon. The Storyteller has the final say on which crucible member helped the most.

Each time a character is directly and personally responsible for the complete resolution of the final remaining tether keeping a ghost bound to earth, he immediately loses one Spite *rating* upon that ghost's transcendence. As with the resolution of tethers along the way, only one crucible member gains this greatest of benefits. Each such release should be a major event in all the characters' existences (not just the beneficiary's), and the gradual dissolution of Spite should remain a constant theme set against the backdrop of any chronicle.

SPITE ASCENDANT

Perhaps the worst fate that can befall an **Orpheus** character is when his Spite spirals out of control, sending his soul headlong into oblivion. Since Spite is so innately connected to Vitality, a character's personality shifts as the gulf between the two Traits shortens. When a character's starting Vitality is higher than his Spite

rating, he is relatively "normal" (as defined by his prior actions), and in full control of both his faculties and his behavior regarding others. When Spite equals or exceeds starting Vitality, matters grow dangerous:

Spite Rating = Starting Vitality: At this stage, the character is quite literally of two minds on many subjects with his more violent inclinations rising to the surface, demanding to be heard. When in this state, the character loses fine manipulation of his powers and abilities as a spook, and can only safely rely on the more violent of effects. This is a reflection of his anger and an almost adrenal-like response to the rising tide of his own emotions. Until the character rectifies the situation by lowering his Spite rating, the character suffers a difficulty penalty of one to all attempted nonreflexive actions.

Spite Rating +1 over Starting Vitality: Not only do the conditions of the previous paragraph still apply, but the character further suffers from an increased awareness (and interest in) the whispering siren-call of his own evil side. Whenever the character encounters a Spectre (or other agent of darkness; Storyteller prerogative) he must immediately succeed in a Willpower roll (difficulty of his own Spite rating). If he succeeds, he can fight or resist the Spectre's abilities as normal (but still suffers the above penalty). If he fails, the difficulty of all actions against the Spectre suffers a penalty of two. The player makes this roll only once per scene.

Spite Rating +2 over Starting Vitality: When a character's Spite rating surpasses his starting Vitality by two or more, he immediately gains a number of Stains equal to the difference value. These new Stains last until he can decrease his Spite rating. This hampers the character's interactions with other spooks, incurring a penalty of one to the difficulty of all Social rolls for *each* Stain he's acquired as a result of Spite. Additionally, Spectres flock to his newly invigorated Spite like moths to a flame. If the character uses two or more Stains or taps three or more Spite in any scene, the local Spectres will pay him a visit and try kidnapping him to complete "indoctrination" into Spectrehood.

Spite Rating 10: When a character gains his 10th Spite rating, he becomes a Spectre and is no longer suitable for play.

Note: Storytellers may rule that in certain situations, a supporting character defaults to Spectrehood without hitting a Spite rating of 10. If a supporting character's Spite rating is four or five points above his starting Vitality, the Storyteller can simply deem the spook too far gone for saving.

STAINS

A spook's body, referred to as plasm or gauze, is the semi-corporeal actualization of one's own inner core, a literal reflection of his spiritual and emotional state. This is why spooks generally resemble how they appeared in life; not because they have to, but because this is how they best know themselves. Orpheus Group believes that since plasm is essentially a spiritual construct (in every sense of the word), its very makeup is subject to significant and often grotesque alteration on a subconscious level. These plasm changes arise as a result of the most profound doubts and insecurities of the soul in question — in other words, from Spite. Therefore, ghosts and projected entities have a tendency to develop outward reflections of the Spite within them over time. These marks are known as Stains, and they are directly and innately linked with a ghost's Vitality.

Orpheus further believes that each Stain comes from a place of deeply personal doubt, insecurity, anguish or self-loathing. They are marks of our most repugnant aspects, the ones we dare not even admit to our friends or loved ones. When any of these feelings reach a point where they can and do negatively impact the character's core sense of self, they actually appear as alterations to his "body" whenever he manifests in spook form. These often startling mutations reveal how a given soul truly feels about a particular part of his body or nature. Some even believe that carefully watching Spite marks is the best and truest way to discern what is truly going on in another's heart and soul.

Unfortunately, Orpheus is only partly right. Stains are a reflection of our negative aspects, but they are also part of an emerging personality in the deepest core of the soul, one normally suppressed in life by the wonders of biochemistry. This personality gains more strength as a character's Spite rating increases, and it eventually comes to the fore when the character becomes a Spectre. Before then, however, Stains are a manifestation of all that is unpure and nasty within people. They are also assets of sorts, usable by the character if he just "taps" a little Spite in the process. Scientists may not want to consider this option, but it is a reflexive and survival instinct of the emerging personality, one that allows it to strengthen its presence ever so minutely. The personality is never strong enough to cozen or cajole the character, but it is present as a cracked reflection of the spook's identity, relatively dormant until someone's Spite rating and Vitality match, then draw further apart for the worse.

STARTING STAINS

All **Orpheus** characters (even projectors) begin play with three Stains that they must decide upon during Character Creation. The player may choose three from the list below, or create new ones to achieve finer personalization (all self-styled Stains must be approved by the Storyteller). Players may also purchase up to two additional Stains at this stage, which nets them an additional Freebie Point per Stain, but they are not required to do so in any event.

Please note that active Stains will not appear when the character manifests. They are evident only when the ghost or projected entity is incorporeal.

CHANGING STAINS

Naturally, a person's self-image and personality fluctuate on an almost daily basis, and they can be affected to greater or lesser extent by several factors including, but not limited to, mood, whim, frame of mind, social circumstance, etc. Stains, however, are usually reflective of more deeply-ingrained and personal scars, insecurities or desires, and such things rarely change quite so often (except to make themselves worse).

Regardless, one's Stains can and likely will transform over time, given the right emotional impetus. As a person grows accustomed to aspects of himself he formerly thought repugnant, so too will the outward reflection of those aspects change. When a person grows even more bitter and repulsed by new and different insecurities, he will likewise adopt outward reflections of the same. Any dramatic shift in the character's sense of self, regardless of the direction of that shift, can alter Stains. Whenever a character loses a Spite *rating* (not Spite points), his player may exchange one existing Stain for another to represent his new outlook. Characters may do likewise after *gaining* two dots in Spite rating, with negative shifts representing a significant change to a person's sense of self.

THE DANGERS OF STAINS

Although each Stain comes with an advantage, it is important to remember that intrinsically, Stains are outward reflections of one's own Spite. They can reveal a soul's innermost workings, laying his personality open for all to see and scrutinize. Add in the fact that Stains can twist the character's appearance into a ghastly and often grotesque parody of his living form, and the combination should be more than enough to make any normal person wish his Stains would just vanish. This too is part of the emerging personality's way of gaining a stronger foothold... by alienating the character from the world around him... by isolating him in his pain and misery.

Beyond personal impact, however, there are other worries where Stains are concerned. Stains can hamper one's dealings with other ghosts and projected entities; after all, it's harder to believe that a spook will lead you to transcendence when he looks like something out of a Stuart Gordon film. For each Stain a character possesses beyond his initial three (or five, depending on character creation), he suffers a difficulty penalty of one to all Social rolls involving other spooks.

Stains are also a "slippery slope" issue. A character gains a Stain for every point of permanent Spite he accumulates in excess of his Vitality rating. Thus, if a character with a starting Vitality of 5 acquires his seventh dot of Spite rating, he must take two new Stains. Then, if he later gains yet another Spite rating (raising his total to 8), he acquires yet another Stain. These Stains are sure to affect the character's relations with other spooks negatively, especially those who witnessed his degeneration all along. Should the character reduce his Spite rating later on, he likewise eliminates the adjoining penalties.

USING STAINS

The Stains offered herein are meant only as a sampling of the myriad sorts of gauze mutations that can occur. While they mostly appear when the character loses ground with Spite, the character can also bring forth and use a Stain to his benefit willingly if he possesses a Spite rating of four or higher. By tapping Spite points, the brave character can bring his Stain to the surface and use it for a number of turns equal to the number of Spite points tapped. For each point tapped, however, the character must roll one die against difficulty 7. Each failed die roll, however, saddles the character with an additional Spite point, while each botched roll incurs two Spite points. The character cannot tap Spite ratings in this instance.

ADDER'S SCALES

This Stain turns the character's skin into a body canvas of gold-green or black snake scales, making it more supple and better protected.

Advantage: All difficulties to escape bonds or effect particularly athletic maneuvers decrease by one. The Storyteller decides when a situation is appropriate. The scales also grant the character an extra die to soak physical damage

Disadvantage: The character is particularly sensitive to extreme temperatures (freezing or below and 80 degrees and above). In either situation, the character suffers a penalty of one to all difficulties. An optional, alternative rule for Storytellers is that the character is more easily startled and likelier to react by lashing out first and fast. In this way, the player must succeed in a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) once per scene, or inadvertently lash out physically or verbally when surprised by something in the scene. Storyteller prerogative when this occurs.

BAT'S EARS

This Stain twists the character's ears into those of a large bat, rising black and bristled from the side of the ghost's head like the neckpiece of a cape.

Advantage: The character gains the ability to perceive his surroundings through echo location (sonar, essentially) and can therefore "see" in the dark. This ability can even detect creatures that are concealed, hiding or incorporeal.

Disadvantage: Whenever the character actively uses this Stain's advantage, his other senses are dulled, giving him a penalty of two to all Perception roll difficulties not involving the use of echolocation.

BRISTLING HIDE

The character grows a rough, bristle-covered layer of barbed hide, giving him a savage appearance and damaging anyone who hits him.

Advantage: The hide not only imparts one point of armor, but it also injures brawling opponents who successfully strike the character. The hide inflicts one die of lethal damage against unarmed opponents, though the character can certainly grapple or punch opponents to inflict that +1 lethal die as well.

Disadvantage: The hide is also a menace to the character's allies within the crucible. Every day the characters meet or interact as spooks, the other player must succeed at a Willpower roll (difficulty 7). If they fail, they wandered too close to their friend and accidentally brushed against him, earning a level in lethal damage (which they can soak).

CARAPACE

This Stain alters the entirety of the character's back, from the base of his head down to his legs, into a hard beetlelike carapace with a division down the middle.

Advantage: The character gains an additional die to soak any attack coming at him from behind. Additionally, the carapace can part to reveal a pair of thin, membranous wings that allow the spook to "jump" in short spurts like a junebug (maximum distance per jump equals the spook's [Strength x2] in meters).

Disadvantage: The carapace is both bulky and cumbersome, incurring a difficulty penalty of one on all Dexterity-based rolls.

CHAMELEON SKIN

Whenever this Stain manifests, the ghost's plasm constantly shifts in color and texture to match its background.

Advantage: The character gains three bonus dice on all Stealth rolls.

Disadvantage: The spook has no control over this Stain. Whenever it manifests, the character's "skin" shifts color and texture according to the background. In these situations, the character's Social-related dice pools (Attribute and Ability combined) are halved

around other spooks. The main reason is that the character cannot use his own body language to influence or impress others. In fact, other spooks have problems seeing the character clearly.

CLAWS

A character with this Stain no longer has human hands, but instead possesses a pair of wicked claws. Player determines whether they are birdlike, bone growths, slasher-flick finger blades, alienesque, etc.

Advantage: The claws inflict Strength +2 lethal damage during combat.

Disadvantage: The character has greater difficulty performing delicate manipulations like picking a lock or repairing a broken radio. All rolls requiring precision (Storyteller discretion) suffer a penalty of two to their difficulties.

COMPOUND EYE

One of the most visually stunning of Stains, this causes the character's eyes to become like those of a fly — red domes composed of hundreds of ommatidia.

Advantage: Having compound eyes means a wider range of visual acuity, allowing the character to see things above his head and behind his normal periphery.

Disadvantage: Since compound eyes are incapable of changing focus, the character loses whatever distance vision he normally has while this Stain is active. This incurs a penalty of two to difficulty rolls involved in ranged combat.

DAGGERTONGUE

This Stain transforms the character's tongue into a sharp dagger that can extend up to seven feet away and retract as though on a spring.

Advantage: The character acquires a ranged brawling attack that inflicts Strength +1 lethal damage at range.

Disadvantage: The character cannot speak without inflicting some spiteful, verbal abuse against anyone within earshot. It is a form of spiritually aggressive Tourette's Syndrome wherein the character has no internal editor to censor his speech. He must succeed at a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) to stop this from happening and thus speak properly. Any success lasts for the duration of the scene. Any failure does likewise.

GAUZE QUILLS

Razorlike quills cover the spook's arms and face, giving the character sensitivity to local air and ethereal flows and displacements.

Advantage: Perception difficulties are reduced by one, and all impairments to the character's vision (from injury, fog, etc.) are nullified within a 30-foot radius.

Disadvantage: The quills add a sixth sensory organ for the character, the confusion from which causes all Wits-based rolls to suffer a one to difficulty penalties.

GOSSAMERWEBS

The character's gauze becomes sticky, allowing him to slough off web-thin epidermal layers of "skin" to trap or encase opponents.

Advantage: Through a successful Brawl attack, the character may leave behind a sticky swath of gauze to trap, blind or pin an opponent. Each Vitality point expended in this matter creates binding equal to two dots of Strength (thus allowing the opponent to rip free of it upon a successful Strength roll). If the Brawl attack succeeds by three or fewer successes, the Storyteller dictates the effect. If the player succeeds by four dice or more, he dictates what part of the body is hampered. The basic targets are: Eyes (blinds the opponent fully); legs (hinders mobility, preventing the target from moving); one arm (increases difficulty of Brawl maneuvers by two; the character can never pin both arms in one attack).

Disadvantage: The character automatically loses gauze (and thus Vitality) when he passes through an object that's over half his size and larger (chairs, doors, desks, etc.). The character can still spend Vitality to remain completely intangible for the scene (protecting him from constant bullet fire, for example), but he loses one Vitality for each large object he passes through.

HAMH'S 8EAH

This Stain pulls the character's nose and face into the shape and hardness of a hawk's beak, giving him an unearthly avian appearance.

Advantage: The character gains a bite attack that does Strength +1 lethal damage.

Disadvantage: The character has no lips and cannot form some words properly. Communication becomes stunted at best and unintelligible at worst. He must succeed at a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) to stop this from happening and thus speak properly. Any success is for the duration of the scene. Any failure is likewise.

LEPER

Some spooks are so tenuously connected to their own spirituality that parts of their body drop away in leprous chunks.

Advantage: The character can leave behind one portion of himself that lasts for 24 hours before disintegrating away completely. For that period, however, the character can see, hear and speak through his one discarded portion, regardless the distance between the two, even if the spook is encased in flesh. The character cannot launch Horrors through the leprous gauze, but it is mobile, moving at a rate of one foot per turn. The

blob of gauze cannot defend itself, unfortunately, and dissipates upon taking any damage.

Disadvantage: Although the parts grow back each day, so too does a new part of the character fall off, afflicting him with a variety of ailments. To simplify matters, however, each ailment deprives a character of two dice for dice pools pertaining to two relatively related Attributes. To determine which Attributes fall victim to this penalty because an eye or hand dropped off or because a spiritual muscle withered, roll one die and consult the following results:

and consult the following results:					
Die Roll	Attribute	SuggestedAppendage			
Result					
1	Strength & Dexterity	Hand or foot			
2	Strength & Stamina	Entire leg or arm			
3	Dexterity & Stamina	Hand or foot			
4	Charisma & Manipulation	Eyes or mouth			
5	Charisma & Appearance	Nose or face			
6	Manipulation & Appearance	Mouth or face			
7	Perception & Intelligence	Eyes or brain			
8	Perception & Wits	One of the five senses			
9	Intelligence & Wits	Brain or one of the			
		five senses			
0	Storyteller's Choice				

Whether the character used the Stain only briefly or possesses it because of high Spite, the Stain's negative effect remains active for 24 hours before the part regenerates.

MAN-OF-WAR

This vile Stain seems to "liquefy" the character's gauze, giving him the appearance and texture of an enormous, humanoid jellyfish.

Advantage: The character takes half damage (round down) from bashing attacks.

Disadvantage: The character's own body mass is semi-solid in consistency and moves in unexpected ways, resulting in a difficulty penalty of one to all Dexterity rolls.

MARTYRED

This Stain remembers every painful injury committed against the character, and manifests the wounded, bleeding gauze for all to see.

Advantage: Once per turn, the character can attempt to touch an opponent in hand-to-hand combat (treat as an attack using Brawl). If the character succeeds, he inflicts the last injury he received (in equal dice), whether in this combat or last week's, upon the target (though the opponent can attempt a soak). If



the Storyteller does not remember the last attack, he can use the character's Strength + number of Successes to hit as the default dice pool.

Disadvantage: If ever the character rolls a botch while this Stain is active, he "relives" his last wound, and suffers the damage. Again, the character can attempt to soak the damage and the Storyteller can use the default system mentioned above.

PSEUDOPODS

Like amoebic tentacles, the character's gauze can grow amorphous limbs that curve and stretch like putty up to a range of ten feet.

Advantage: The character has multiple limbs, and can use them to engage in hand-to-hand combat at range. He can also grab items and manipulate them crudely. He cannot fire a gun, for example, but he can flip a light switch or turn a door knob. This does not grant the character additional actions, which still requires the character to split his relevant dice pools.

Disadvantage: For the duration of a scene, the character must succeed at a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) or accidentally use a pseudopod instead of his limb to perform an action. The action either incurs a penalty of two to the relevant difficulty or eliminates two dice from a pertinent dice pool (Storyteller discretion according to the situation).

SHARK'S APPETITE

The character's mouth grows into a maw with teeth that are thick and jagged, like those of a piranha or shark. He even develops additional rows behind the first, right to the back of his throat.

Advantage: The character gains the ability to eat anything and masticate it to a quick pulp by latching on to it with his mouth. By succeeding in a Clinch maneuver (see p. 231), the character automatically inflicts Strength + 2 lethal damage for each turn he continues grappling the opponent. He can also destroy artifacts by masticating them, using Strength + Spite (difficulty 7).

Disadvantage: The character has a voracious appetite in this form, and must eat constantly or devour portions of himself. Once a scene, the character loses a point of Vitality if he does not ingest *something* (and that includes successfully attacking a target for any potential damage). Storytellers can dictate that this incurs the loss of three Vitality per day for as long as the character is out of flesh (re-entering one's body or possessing someone both offer relief from the hunger).

SHIFTING IDENTITY

Some people have little credible self-image, whether it's horrific self-esteem or unrealistic appraisals of themselves. The Stain slowly shifts a spook's looks and even identity around like silly putty, a reflection of how little they knew themselves.

Advantage: Because spooks are essentially exposed avatars of their personalities, they can willingly "tweak" facets of themselves to alter their own Social Attributes. With this Stain, the character can exchange one dot in Charisma, Manipulation and Appearance with another by manipulating elements of their very being, altering people's perceptions of, or interactions with, themselves. So, the spook can heighten Charisma by one dot, for example, at expense of lowering Manipulation or Appearance by one dot. It must be a one-for-one exchange. This modification lasts for the duration of a scene and cannot be altered further.

Disadvantage: The character's features slowly change over the duration of a day, and only return to normal once the Stain is gone. After one day, the character might look like a relative of himself or even just slightly changed, but after two days, the character looks completely different from his former self. This makes establishing relationships with ghosts difficult, and may even force the character to reintroduce himself every few days. Worse, even if someone understands the nature of the changes, this increases the difficulty of any Social rolls with said spooks by two. Storytellers may also rule that for characters using the Stain only briefly, any botched rolls automatically incur an immediate and radical shift in the character's appearance. He turns into "someone else" right on the spot.

SHELETAL FORM

Ever hear the expressions of someone who's so transparent, you can see right through them? Well, now the character is nothing but a walking skeleton, his gauze coalesced into bone.

Advantage: The character can attempt to frighten the onlooker (including sensitives among the living) using Manipulation + Intimidation, the difficulty being the target's Willpower.

Disadvantage: The character automatically fails his Social rolls or, at the very least, rolls against difficulty 10 in related situation.

SPIDER'S BRISTLES

When a character manifests this Stain, a carpet of hairy bristles emerges from the skin on his hands, arms and legs. Their curious design lends the character the appearance that he's possessed of wirelike body (and palm) hair.

Advantage: The character can climb up walls and other sheer surfaces by using his bristles, in much the

same way a spider does. If he tries carrying another spook, however, he no longer adheres.

Disadvantage: To effect fine manipulation, the character must succeed in a Willpower roll (difficulty 7); otherwise, the bristles remain and the character is constantly and accidentally pulling things he didn't disengage from properly. The drawback effect halves his dice pools on anything involving a light tough to a minimum of one.

WITHERED

This Stain withers a character's plasm so that regardless his Vitality, he always appears desiccated and several months past dead.

Advantage: The character registers as a zero-Vitality entity, meaning that he can expend as much Vitality as he possesses within a single turn and not register to Spectres or other spooks (at least those not within line-of-sight).

Disadvantage: The character's gauze is flaky and crumbles easily. Bashing damage against the character inflicts an additional two dice per attack, though the character may still soak the damage.

WILLPOWER

Among the most important of Traits in an Orpheus games, Willpower measures an individual's drive, determination and self-confidence. Much like Vitality, Willpower measures on a scale of one to 10 and has both a starting rating (determined at character creation) and temporary points. Whenever the Storyteller deems that a player must make a proper Willpower roll, he uses the starting rating to determine dice pool, regardless of the temporary Willpower points remaining. Players can also spend temporary Willpower points for their characters to achieve a variety of effects (see Spending Willpower below), though each one must pertain to the character using sheer determination in overcoming obstacles.

Characters who exhaust all their temporary Willpower points are spent, both physically and emotionally. They used their reserves of resolve and become generally listless and apathetic to their situation. They are also likelier to surrender to circumstance than they would normally, and find it difficult to struggle for or against much of anything. Characters can regain Willpower points several ways, but should spend Willpower wisely since recovering it is rarely easy.

SpinelessWeakUnassertiveDiffident

Certain
Confident
Determined
Controlled
Iron-Willed
Unshakable

WILLPOWER

The ability to persevere through sheer moxie is a special gift indeed, and is useful to **Orpheus** characters in many different ways.

• Players can spend a Willpower point to gain an automatic success on a single action. They can spend only one point in a single turn this way, but the success is guaranteed and cannot be canceled, even by a botch. Thus, characters can achieve at least minimal success on any action through pure will and effort. For extended rolls, Willpower successes can help speed things along significantly.

To use Willpower in this fashion, the player must declare he is spending the Willpower point *before* making the roll. One cannot spend Willpower retroactively to strengthen a success or cancel an untimely botch. The Storyteller may also declare Willpower invalid on certain types of rolls.

- Players may also spend Willpower to ignore penalties due to wounds or other distractions for one turn per point of Stamina the character possesses, representing focused concentration upon the task at hand in a last-ditch effort of will.
- Spending a point of Willpower can also reenergize Vitality. This is done reflexively, and each point thus spent instantly adds three Vitality to one's total. Willpower-born Vitality may even exceed one's starting Vitality rating (except in a hue's case). When spending this Vitality, however, the cap on natural healing remains.

REGAINING WILLPOWER

There are several ways **Orpheus** characters can recover lost Willpower. Note that one's temporary Willpower may never exceed one's Willpower rating, which represents the ceiling on that character's force of will. The only method to increasing a Willpower rating is through experience (p. 201).

Ultimately, recovering Willpower is a matter of the character reaffirming his sense of confidence and determination. Thus, certain actions or situations may allow the character to regain spent Willpower over the course of a story. We encourage Storytellers to tailor the recovery of Willpower to suit the story, with the caveat that Willpower is a powerful and useful Trait. Storytellers shouldn't permit characters to recover Willpower too quickly lest they dilute the challenge.

- Characters regain all temporary Willpower at the end of a story (not necessarily game session, but story). The Storyteller may require the characters achieve some particular objective or otherwise gain a feeling of success (if just a little) to qualify for this restoration of self-confidence. In situations where the characters grew frustrated or simply negotiated a stalemate, however, the Storyteller may deem that a partial Willpower recovery might be in order.
- Characters who indulge in a full night's rest (eight full hours of sleep) can recharge their batteries and can now approach matters refreshed. The Storyteller should return one Willpower point to each character who partakes of such rest. At the Storyteller's discretion, certain powers or Abilities (like Meditation) may allow a character to achieve a similar end result without actually resting.
- If a given character achieves a particular goal or performs a significant confidence-affirming action, the Storyteller may reward her one Willpower point as a bonus.
- When a character behaves in accordance with her Nature, she affirms her sense of self; the Storyteller may reward this with a Willpower point (or two, for appropriate actions). This holds especially true in **Orpheus**, where a character's Nature is arguably the most important Trait of her entire being, constituting her entirety in essence.
- The last way characters recover Willpower concerns group effort. If a given crucible (as a team) finds themselves in a tight situation where they de-

cide to advance, even when pushing on might lead to ruin, the Storyteller can respond by awarding extra Willpower for group unity and sheer doggedness. Such awards are great for player morale, and can be wise game "investments."

HEALT<u>H</u>

"Health?" you say. "For the disembodied?" Indeed.

While it's true that **Orpheus** stories are told through characters who move as ghosts and projected entities, this is certainly not saying they are immortal — in whichever state. While projecting, characters (save skimmers) use their Vitality to determine their physical state. That part is easy. Unfortunately, projectors also have physical bodies to which they can and must return; skimmers manifest their injuries through their bodies, and sleepers hurt themselves by shunting Spite points into their flesh. This is where the Health Trait comes in.

In body (or for projectors), characters have seven "health levels," as shown on the character sheet and the Health table. When the character is encased in flesh, or a projecting entity, takes physical damage, he loses one or more health levels until he can recover them through rest or supernatural healing. Characters inhabiting flesh or projecting also accumulate penalties to movement, actions and dice pools due to the effects of their injuries (yes, even if projecting). If a penalty reduces a character's dice pool to zero on any given action, he cannot attempt that action. A player, however, can spend a Willpower point so that his character ignores wound penalties for one turn per dot of Stamina he possesses.

Health Level	Dice Pool Penalty Movement Penalty		
Bruised	None	Character is only bruised a little and suffers no dice penalties due to damage.	
Hurt	-1	Character is superficially hurt and suffers no movement hindrance.	
Injured	1	Character suffers minor injuries and movement is mildly impaired (halve running speed).	
Wounded	-2	Character suffers significant damage and my not run (though he may still walk). The character may not move and attack freely; he <i>always</i> loses dice when moving and attacking in the same turn.	
Mauled	-2	Character is badly hurt and may only hobble about (three yards/turn).	
Crippled Incapacitated	-5	Character is severely injured and may only crawl (one yard/turn). Character is incapable of movement, is likely unconscious and may not move until healed of at least one wound level.	

GHOSTS AND DEATH

Unlike other games, where death is the final chapter of a character's story, this is not so in **Orpheus**. For these characters, death is — as they say — only the beginning.

When a projector's body dies, he is no longer the character he once was, nor even human, anymore. His Lament changes immediately to either spirit or hue (depending on whether the character was a pigment user in life or not), and the character is now a ghost. He receives five Freebie Points during the transition (not experience points, mind you, but Freebies) that he can spend on anything he likes.

At this point, the Health chart has little consequence to the character's existence. The mortal coil doesn't constrain him anymore, and while this may be a good thing on occasion, the character must realize that he no longer has refuge when the going gets rough. The character's very being now relies on his strength of selfhood and identity. This translates into Vitality, a Trait that is both energy and body. Only by completely and permanently draining both Vitality and Willpower to zero is a ghost truly destroyed. So long as a single point of either remains, the character can and will eventually reconstitute his own strength of being.

EXPERIENCE

Everyone is capable of learning from experience, including the dead. In the world of **Orpheus**, only the likes of drones are truly stagnant entities, incapable of any self-discovery beyond the rote of their miserable circumstances. All player characters continue learning and growing, developing their abilities and skills during their time as Orpheus Group's agents. Experience points measure the effects of this development.

At the conclusion of each story (or story chapter), the Storyteller awards a variable number of experience points to the characters. Players can then use experience to improve existing Traits or acquire new ones. Players must keep track of what experience points they've acquired and spent, and they are typically restricted to spending them during breaks between stories (or between chapters, for longer stories).

Final approval on what each character may improve resides in the Storyteller's hands. If a character did nothing in the previous sessions to justify a given expenditure, the Storyteller is within his right to refuse that expenditure. After all, it makes little sense for a character to raise an Ability he hasn't used or

even been exposed to before. If the Storyteller allows for that improvement, he may still require the character to undergo training or spend some time practicing with the Trait in question for the raise to take effect. This holds especially true for characters hoping to acquire a completely new Trait they didn't possess before. We encourage enterprising Storytellers to work character improvement into their stories themselves, whether it be as story hooks, through sending characters off to find training/mentors or providing them with opportunities to further grow and develop in different ways.

As a rule, Storytellers should not allow characters to improve a given Trait by more than one dot per story, unless the improvement (and the story) transpires over a long period of time. Improving oneself takes time and effort, and Storytellers are encouraged to be ever-mindful of what their players are working toward.

NEW TRAITS

For existing Traits, improvement is a simple matter. All the player must do is save up the appropriate amount of experience, and when the time comes, spend it. This usually improves the Trait in question by one. Acquiring entirely new Traits, however, is a bit more involved. Characters don't simply "figure out" how to speak a new language, for example, or even learn the rudiments of a given skill set overnight. Learning a new Horror, for example, usually requires the character receive at least minimal instruction from someone who knows the Horror he wishes to learn (unless, of course, the new Horror is already innate to the character). The only time that one learns a noninnate Horror without receiving instruction is when the character uses his ability to drain Vitality from another ghost. If the target ghost expires as a direct or indirect result of this Vitality drain, the character may (at Storyteller discretion) develop one of the two innate Horrors possessed by his victim. Experience cost is the same; the character simply sidesteps the need for outside instruction. Each Shade also has a forbidden set of Horrors he can never learn, even by means of Vitality drain.

Learning a new Ability requires a period of study and practice (time varies) in addition to the necessary experience points. In most cases, the character must also have guidance of some kind, instruction to help the character learn the basics of the new Ability. This can range from reading some books or taking a night course to a months-long apprenticeship with a suitable teacher. The Storyteller has the final say on what

measures and steps are prerequisite to picking up the new Ability, though most Abilities can be studied or practiced in the time between stories and other downtime in the chronicle.

CHANGING LAMENTS

Let's face it... everybody dies. The difference, however, is that in **Orpheus** chronicles, death does not signify the end of a character, but rather a new beginning. Although a character's Shade remains fixed once set, his Lament is certainly flexible; all it takes is a little bit of death.

When a sleeper or skimmer dies, his Lament immediately changes to either spirit or hue. The determining factor is whether the character used pigment in life or not. If he did, then his Lament is now hue; if not, he becomes a spirit. Regardless, a projector's demise bestows upon him five Freebie Points to be spent as the player desires. Call it death's silver lining. From that point onward, the Health chart is superfluous to the character, since his very existence is now tied to his Vitality and Willpower.

Projectors can also change their Lament in a less violent fashion. Once a skimmer uses sleeper technology to project, he cannot go back to skimming without retraining. Skimming borders on the transcendental while sleeping is science trying to emulate a natural function through force. Once a skimmer becomes a sleeper, he loses touch with that trained subconscious and must relearn everything. Sleepers can also eventually learn how to project without cryogenics and embalming cocktails. This process typically takes both time and practice, though there are some "quick studies" who learn skimming in very little time. The Storyteller dictates the time and experience required to change from sleeper to skimmer. Characters can sidestep this transition, however, via the drug known as pigment, which will change their Lament to skimmer over a brief period of regular use. Changing from sleeper to skimmer earns the character no free or new Traits, aside from the shift in Lament.

AUARDING EXPERIENCE

If Storytelling is an art, then awarding experience is one of the most important skills of that craft. Doling out too much experience forces the characters to advance perhaps more quickly than the story should allow, often leading to "growing pains" on the part of the troupe's players. The last thing an **Orpheus** Storyteller wants is for super-powered characters to scoff at his so-called challenges, rather than to fear and respect the opposition. Conversely, awarding too few experience points leads to player frustration, with the crucible (and troupe) feeling like it accomplishes nothing for all its

hard work. The art is in striking the proper balance between legitimate reward and either stingy reticence or senseless gluttony. Properly rewarding players for their accomplishments is an essential aspect of all **Orpheus** games; it's what heightens their enjoyment and keeps them returning for more.

The following guidelines provide a baseline from which to work with regards to experience allocation. If a Storyteller follows these recommendations, the end result should be a troupe that advances at a pace relative to the story (given regular play). For those running extra-long sessions, or those not playing as frequently as others, the Storyteller should adjust these numbers upward by a point or two per character.

END OF CHAPTER

At the end of each regular game session or chapter in a longer story (assume between three and six hours of play), the Storyteller should award between one and five experience points to each character. One point is automatic, representing experience acquired simply by virtue of experiencing the story's events. Beyond that, however, the Storyteller should award additional experience on merit, with five points representing a truly remarkable performance (in every way) on the player's part during that session. Please bear in mind that "remarkable" implies something beyond the norm for that specific player, including those who are normally good roleplayers. This way, both strong and weak roleplayers have equal chance of accruing experience based on how well they perform each session, with their own skills establishing the baseline.

One Point — Automatic: Every character receives one point for his participation.

One Point — Learning Curve: Ask each player what his character learned from the session. If you agree that it was been a learning experience, award this point.

One Point — Roleplaying: If a player portrayed his character well, including remaining true to his Nature and providing entertaining moments for the group, the character should receive an additional experience point. Truly outstanding roleplaying can merit *two* extra experience points.

One Point — Heroism: Characters who truly transcend their normal limits by way of acts of daring and heroism are deserving of an extra experience point.

END OF STORY

At the story's conclusion (covering several chapters and sessions), you may also award a few extra experience points as a bonus for completing the tale.

One Point — Success: If the characters achieve the objective or conquer the story challenge, overcoming obstacles to do so, award an experience point.

One Point — Danger: Characters receive an extra experience point for surviving terrible danger and/or overcoming great odds over the story's course.

One Point — Wisdom: If a player concocted a brilliant scheme or originated a brilliant idea that helped the crucible succeed, award that character an extra experience point for the sudden insight and understanding.

END OF CHRONICLE

This stage can be the most fulfilling time of a character's existence. When an entire story arc (comprising of numerous sessions and two or more stories) concludes, it effectively wraps up a chapter in both the players' and characters' lives. For characters, it's a time of great fulfillment, not only because they completed an extended storyline, but because they will receive three bestowals of experience in one shot: First for the concluding session, second for ending the story that ends the chronicle, and third for the end of the chronicle, itself. Unlike session or story awards, however, which are personalized, end of chronicle awards are given to the crucible as a unit, representing awards for teamwork.

One Point — Unity: If the crucible proved itself greater than the sum of its parts over the course of the chronicle, and not just a collection of individuals, award each member of that crucible an extra experience point.

One Point — Growth: During the narrative of these characters' lives, did each help the others grow as characters over the chronicle's course? Are they all more vibrant and three-dimensional as a result of group roleplaying? If so, award each member of the crucible an extra experience point.

One Point — Grace: If the crucible as a whole tried (and succeeded) in making the transcendence of ghosts a top priority, and in so doing managed to keep themselves relatively free of Spite, each member should receive one point. If even a single member of the group was been lost to Spite, and thus Spectrehood, do not award this point.

EXPERIENCE COSTS				
Trait	Cost			
New Ability	3			
New Horror	15			
Attribute	current rating x4			
Ability	current rating x2			
Specialty	current rating			
Background	current rating x3			
Vitality	current rating x3			
Willpower	current rating x2			



"What are you?" Etzel asked with a whimper.

"I'm the guy who's got your body," Chet replied. "Say, this Porsche of yours is a fine car."

"Why?" Etzel said. "Why are you doing this to me? What'd I ever do to you?"

"To me?" Chet paused. "Nothing. I just don't like you, Etzel. I don't like your moonshine about a 'New Economy' that only young snots like you can understand. I don't like you smuggling dope after people wised up to your dot—com fad. And you're a genius. Way too smart for the cops and Feds, right?" Chet slowed at the red light and checked the traffic before he took his right turn. "And a girl asked me to. I never could turn down a dame."

"Valerie!" Etzel said, fuming. The candy apple-red Porsche weaved a moment; Chet felt the threads of Etzel's life pulling from his grip. Etzel even pounded his fist on the dashboard before Chet regained control. For the moment, he let Etzel talk. "Damn, I knew that bitch would make trouble! Palimony, ha! Whatever she's paying you, I can pay ten times as much."

Chet took over Etzel's voice again. "Ahh... I did talk to Miss Quantrell. Nice ass, you should have kept her. But no, she didn't hire me."

Etzel surprised Chet. He had recovered from the shock of being possessed faster than the old soldier had ever seen before. Now he even tried negotiating, tried buying his way out. Yeah, right.

"You're just a hobby for me, Etzel. You and your Colombian friends. No, my client is a little lady, a Miss Delfina Suarez. Your friend Almeyda hired her for a party. Gave her enough coke and black heroin to kill a steer. Dumped her body. She's a bit upset, is Miss Delfina. I took care of Almeyda for her, and he led me to you. I figure, never leave a job half-done."

"Ghosts," Etzel said. He sounded more intrigued than frightened. "You're a ghost. I read about you guys.... But, all this trouble over a crack whore? Come on, with your powers...."

"Watch your mouth, sonny," Chet said. "I heard some pretty raw talk in my time. Did a lot of it myself. But you never speak ill of the dead, got it? They listen." Chet turned left, heading into the Santa Monica Mountains. "And don't try buying me. I'm doing this because a pretty girl

asked. And because to people like you and Almeyda, she's just another Suzy Rottenerotch to use and throw away, and nobody can touch you. Except me."

The car sped up, swinging around the turns. Etzel snorted. "Great. I'm possessed by a ghost who thinks he's a white knight."

Etzel's lips curved in an unpleasant smile. "Almeyda didn't think so when I killed him," Chet said.

"You? Almeyda was shot by one of his own men - oh." Now Etzel sounded less sure of himself.

"Right. One of his own men," Chet said. "Just like last week your secretary Janice sent the DEA an interesting package. And the week before that, Markowitz talked about selling you out to the Fabronis, where you would hear. I just about bust my gut laughing at what you did to him. Ramirez, Ascot... you've been my hobby for the last month, Etzel." The Porsche sped past a stretch of scrubby pines and laurels, but Chet felt the lush, dense foliage of Vietnam hiding just outside his view. "And you didn't suspect a thing. Gee, maybe you're not such a genius after all."

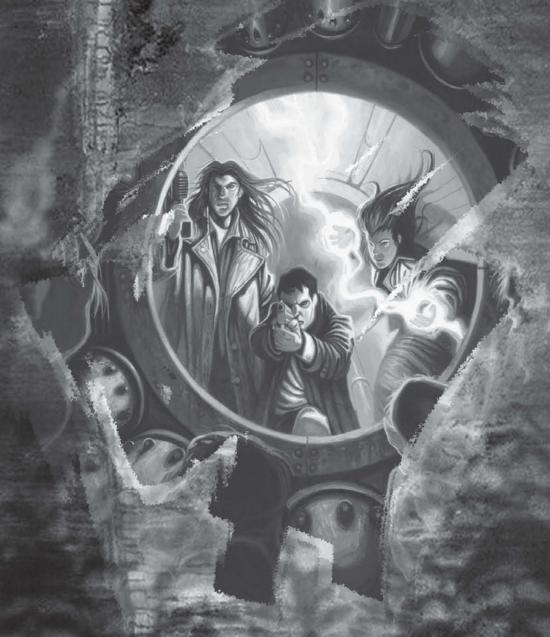
"Please. I'll give you anything. Do anything you want." Etzel's voice shook. "There must be someone you care about. Someone who could use a lot of money."

"Nope." The car whipped around the first in a series of switchbacks. To the left rose a cliff. To the right and ahead, the steep hillside descended to Sherman Oaks.

Etzel almost screamed, "Then what do you want?" The vines and rubber-trees of Vietnam surged forward. As the Porsche approached another switchback, Chet slid out of Etzel's body to sit beside him. Unseen and intangible, he kept one hand on Etzel's leg, forcing it to push the accelerator to the floor. Would he have enough energy to resist the crash? Chet gritted imaginary teeth and somehow found the reserves he needed. Etzel tried taking the turn, but the car was going too fast. Chet dove through the side of the car and rolled across the tarmac while the Porsche smashed through the fence. The car tumbled end over end, crashing through the undergrowth. Puffing with imaginary exertion, Chet pushed himself to his feet. He looked down at the ruin of the Porsche.

"I want you dead," he said. And then, "Shame about the car."

CHAPTER FOUR: Working the system



"Rules? I don't need your rules, motherfucker! I can walk through walls!"

- Anonymous Flatliner Doctor: Where do you live, Simon?
Mary Forbes (as Simon): I live inside the weak and the wounded.

A game needs rules. Storytelling games are no exception. The players decide what their characters try to do or how they react to events around them. The Storyteller can usually decide, in the same way, how other people react to the characters — but what about the rest of the world? How to decide whether a bullet hits its target, or whether a character knows an obscure piece of information or whether one character deceives another? Some things you just can't roleplay. Other situations present a conflict of interest between players. Rules supply an objective way to determine whether an action succeeds or not, and ensure that all characters receive the same fair treatment.

Orpheus uses just a few rules to handle most tasks that characters may attempt. This chapter covers the most basic rules, which set the pattern for the entire game system. These basic patterns are capable of endless permutations to cover nearly any situation. Once you know the patterns, the details — the rules in the other chapters — are easy to figure out.

TIME

Time within a game does not work like time in the real world. An event that might take hours in the real world, like a plane trip to another country, might require a few seconds of description: "You get on the plane. The food is lousy and the in-flight movie is worse. You're glad when you reach your destination." On the other hand, a situation that might take a few minutes in real time, like a brawl between several people, might take more than an hour to play out as a game. Characters do not play every second of their lives; the game treats the dramatic high points in detail and skims over the rest.

Instead of accounting for time second by second, **Orpheus** measures time in six basic units. We define each division by how many actions characters can perform in it:

- Turn The amount of time required to perform a simple, specific action. A turn can last anywhere from a few seconds to a few minutes, depending on the character's task or the pacing of the current scene. Consider the difference between a fistfight in a bar and a gunfight in a crowded warehouse. In the former, characters rapidly throw and block punches, so each turn might last a second or two. In the latter case, a turn might consist of whole minutes while characters sneak about trying to draw a bead on each other.
- Scene The amount of time characters require to perform a meaningful sequence of actions and interactions in a single location. A scene begins when characters set out to accomplish something and ends when they finish. It contains as many turns as necessary for characters to pursue their actions maybe none, if the scene consists entirely of dialogue and character

interplay. For instance, a scene might consist of your character stealing data from a corporate office; an attempt to bluff your way past a security guard by posing as a delivery person would count as a turn within that scene. Think of scenes as points in the movie where actors accomplish one objective or reach a point of change. Driving in a car can be a scene, as can confronting the villain verbally.

- Downtime Everything in a character's life that you don't need to play out in detail through turns or scenes, like that plane trip mentioned above. Important matters can happen in downtime, like gathering information or going out on a date, but spending hours of playing time on them would be tedious.
- Chapter An independent part of a story, usually played out in a single game session. It consists of several scenes, with downtime between them, in which characters try achieving some goal, just like a chapter in a novel or an act in a play.
- Story A full tale, with a beginning, middle, climax and end. In a storytelling game, a story may consist of a single chapter (i.e., play session) or require several chapters.
- Chronicle A series of stories linked by a common set of characters. A common theme or ongoing plot may additionally link the stories within a game.

ACTIONS

As players, you have your characters pursue many matters. Not all tasks, however, count as actions. You can handle some deeds, like conversing with another character, through roleplaying. You don't usually keep track of how much time such events take. A deed counts as an action if the duration actually matters and you can imagine some circumstance that could render the task difficult. For instance, running across a street is an action: It is willed; the time to accomplish it could matter (can you cross quickly enough to catch the bus?), and it may present a challenge (can you dodge through traffic?). An action typically requires a single turn and you cannot break it down into smaller meaningful errands. If a task requires more than a minute or so, it may be part of downtime (see above). If you can break a deed into smaller tasks, then it probably consists of several actions instead of just one. Actions can be physical (shooting a gun, jumping over an obstacle), mental (remembering a password, spotting a person in a crowd) social (pleading with a bureaucrat, flirting in a singles' bar) or even magical (using a ghostly power on someone).

Many actions automatically succeed. There's no real challenge to loading your gun or typing your password into your computer. Challenging actions — like loading your gun while running full-tilt through a crowd,

or guessing the password to someone else's computer — often require dice rolls to determine whether you succeed or fail.

ROLLING DICE

Real life presents endless complications and random factors — more than anyone ever knows about. What's more, nobody succeeds every time at any but the simplest tasks. Combat offers the most obvious example: No system could possibly detail every combination of footwork, feints, jabs and motions of a simple fistfight... so we don't try. Instead, **Orpheus** uses dice to represent all the factors not under a character's control. Whenever your character attempts a difficult task, a dice roll decides the issue.

Orpheus uses 10-sided dice. You can find these dice at game and hobby stores or at some bookstores. A group of players requires at least ten dice, and players may want to have their own — passing handfuls of dice from player to player can become annoying.

The number of dice you roll reflects your character's relative competence or incompetence at a given feat. If your character excels at a task, you roll many dice and have a better chance of success. If your character is not so good, you roll fewer dice and failure becomes more likely.

RATINGS

How many dice do you roll for a task? *Trait ratings* measure your character's aptitudes and abilities, both innate and learned. A character receives a rating from 1 to 5 in most Traits. A rating of 1 represents the feeblest degree of competence. A rating of 2 or 3 indicates some aptitude for the Trait, but nothing special. A 4 in a Trait is something special — people notice the character's prowess — while a 5 represents the peak of human potential. A character can have a 0 rating in a Trait. This usually indicates a skill the character never learned or some special disability. A few special Traits operate on a scale of 1 to 10.

Descriptions of Traits list the normal range of ratings this way, through dots:

X Abysmal or nonexistent

- Poor
- Average
- • Good
- •••• Exceptional
- • • Superb

Whenever rolling dice, you roll one die for every dot in the appropriate Trait. For instance, if your character tries moving something very precisely and he has two dots in Dexterity, you roll two dice. Most times, however, you add together the values of two Traits to represent a combination of native ability and training or experience. The most usual combination consists of an Ability (p. 166) added to an Attribute (p. 160).

Suppose, for instance, your character tries breaking into a car without setting off the alarm. The Storyteller tells you to roll your character's Dexterity + Security — an Attribute plus an Ability. If your character had a rating of 3 in Dexterity and 2 in Security, you would roll five dice for the task. These dice are called the *dice pool* for the action.

Usually, you calculate a dice pool for only one action at a time. See "Multiple Actions" for attempting more than one task in a turn.

Some actions do require a dice pool from a single Trait. This may happen because no possible training can affect a character's chance of success. For instance, no training can help your character push a heavy barrier out of the way. In this case, you base your dice pool on a single Trait — Strength.

Orpheus does not allow some kinds of dice pools. Any dice pool involving Traits rated from 1 to 10 (like Willpower or Vitality) can never have another Trait added: You always roll these Traits "bare." Also, you can never add more than two Traits to form a dice pool. As a result, it's not normally possible for a human character to have more than ten dice in a dice pool. Those creatures that can... are not human.

REFLEXIVES

Not everything your character does counts as an action, even if it involves dice rolls. Most notably, spending Vitality to activate ghostly powers requires so little time that it does not affect what a character can do in a single turn. Your character can accomplish this while doing something else. Such a "free action" is called a *reflexive*.

Soak rolls are another example of reflexives. You roll dice, but you don't will a soak; it just happens automatically. Because of this, soaking damage does not count as an action. You can soak damage and perform another action without this counting as multiple actions in a turn (see elsewhere in this chapter).

Talking is another reflexive. Characters can make short statements to each other during a turn. Even in the thick of combat there's enough spare time for a character to shout, "Behind you!" to a friend, or zing off a cool line to an enemy.

Generally, reflexives involve either pure roleplaying (without any need for dice rolls) or pure game mechanics where the dice roll represents something that takes no time. If in doubt, ask your Storyteller.

DIFFICULTIES

Not every dice roll succeeds. Whenever your character attempts an action, the Storyteller gives you a difficulty number to represent the degree of challenge. Difficulty numbers range between 2 and 10. Each time you score that number or higher on one of your dice, you gain a success. For instance, if an action has a difficulty of 6 and you roll a 2, 3, 4, 7 and 10, then you rolled two successes (the 7 and the 10). The more successes you roll, the better you do. For most actions, rolling one success suffices to perform the task, but that's just a marginal success — good enough to get by. If you score three or more successes, you succeed completely or even spectacularly. Most of the time, scoring such a complete success offers no "in-game" advantage to your character, but the Storyteller might describe how you impress other characters or give you some small, unexpected benefit.

The lower the difficulty, the more easily you score successes. The default difficulty is six, indicating a moderately challenging task. If the Storyteller or rulebook ever tells you to make a roll but does not give you a specific difficulty number, assume that the task is difficulty 6.

The Storyteller has the final say on how hard an attempted action may be and sets difficulty numbers accordingly. If a task seems nearly impossible, she assigns a high difficulty number, whereas if a task seems exceptionally easy she sets a low difficulty number. The two extremes — difficulties of 2 or 10 — should rarely occur, though. At difficulty 2, an action is so easy that it's not worth the player's time to roll dice. At difficulty 10, the laws of probability do funny things: No matter how many dice you roll, you have equal chances for success or a catastrophic failure called a *botch* (explained below), though simple failure remains the most likely outcome.

Some circumstances can raise or lower a difficulty number. Under no circumstance can a difficulty number rise beyond 10, though, so rolling a 10 always counts as a success. The Storyteller is within her rights to say that a task is flat-out impossible. For instance, no conceivable athleticism could let a mortal person jump 100 feet between the roofs of two skyscrapers, while no intellectual acumen can enable someone to translate an unknown language without some reference to a known tongue... not in the time characters have available in a game, anyway.

A Storyteller can also represent a task's difficulty by demanding more than one success from a dice roll. For some tasks, there's no such thing as marginal success. Either you succeed completely or not at all. Consider defusing a bomb as an example: What does it mean to defuse a bomb just a little? In this case, the Storyteller might say the player must score two or even three successes on a single dice roll to complete the job.

DIFFICULTY RATINGS

The following charts should give you an idea of how to assign difficulties to tasks and how difficulties and degrees of success may compare. You can represent the difficulty of a feat either by its difficulty number or by the number of successes needed. Italics indicate the average.

DIFFICULTIES

Three Easy (starting a political argument)

Four Routine (posing as a meter reader)

Five Straightforward (convincing a New Age believer you have psychic powers)

Six Standard (throwing a punch)

Seven Challenging (cracking a business' safe)

Eight Difficult (disabling a security camera with

a thrown rock)

Nine Extremely difficult (bypassing a security system with a stick of gum and a pocketknife)

DEGREES OF SUCCESS

One Success Marginal (breaking a security camera)

Two Successes Moderate (convincing a stranger you have a

legitimate reason to break into their apartment)

Three Successes Complete (bypass the security system and don't

leave a trace)

Four Successes Exceptional (convince a

stranger to donate their life's savings to your cause)

Five or More Successes Phenomenal (turn your worst enemy into a loyal ally)

FAILURE

If you score no successes on your dice roll, your character fails her attempted action... her shot misses; she can't decipher the coded message; the security guard won't let her in. Failure disappoints, but usually does not harm the character.

Example: Skinrider Chet Mason possesses Vito Ferlinghetti, a Mafia don's lieutenant. Chet hopes to extract information about heroin shipments. The Skinrider tries leading the Don to talk about the shipments without giving away that Vito isn't Vito anymore. Lucien the Storyteller tells Chet's player, Dean, to roll Chet's Manipulation + Performance (difficulty 6). Dean rolls a 2, 4, 5, 5 — no successes. Lucien rules that Chet asks questions about matters

Vito ought to know. The Don doesn't suspect the fantastical truth, but he asks to smell Vito's breath, asks the mobster if he's been hit on the head lately and finally tells him to go home and get some sleep. The conversation definitely ends and Chet doesn't learn a thing.

THE RULE OF ONE

Bad luck can foil the most skillful character or most brilliant plan. As a complication to dice rolls, every "1" rolled cancels out a single success. Take the die showing a "1" and one of the dice showing a successful number and set them aside. In this manner, "1s" may reduce a character's success, perhaps all the way to a net failure. Perhaps, even, to a *catastrophic* failure.

BOTCHES

Now and then, characters suffer truly bad fortune. If a die roll garners no successes at all, and one or more "1s" appear, you rolled a *botch*. If you score at least one success — even a success that is canceled out, with further "1s" remaining — the roll remains a simple failure.

A botch is much worse than a normal failure. A botch can ruin a plan or place the character in danger. For comparison, failing a Stealth roll might mean stepping on a twig. Botching a Stealth roll could mean stepping in a bucket, falling on your face and knocking over a potted plant. The Storyteller decides how much mishap a botch represents, but may use the rule for successes in reverse. Just as rolling more successes indicates doing a better job, rolling more "1s" on a botch can indicate a more humiliating or dangerous failure. That's optional, though.

Some Storytellers may find that botches appear a little too frequently in their chronicles (as any veteran roleplayer can attest, the laws of probability can warp strangely once dice start rolling). In that case, the Storyteller may grant everyone, player and supporting characters alike, one "free" botch: The first botch rolled in the game session doesn't count. This optional rule makes afterlife a little easier on **Orpheus** characters. Then again, their enemies are less likely to suffer a run of really bad luck too.

Example: Chet Mason tries to draw the information he wants from some other "goodfellas." Once again, Chet's player rolls the character's Manipulation + Performance (difficulty 6). He gets 1, 2, 4, 5. Not only does a "1" appear, there are no successes, so the action becomes a botch. The Storyteller rules that one mobster replies to a question in Italian, and Chet — still in Vito's body — looks confused. The mobster says, "Since when does our pal Vito not know Italian? I think we've got us a ringer," and draws his gun....

AUTOMATIC SUCCESS

Rolling dice can eat through a lot of game time. It becomes tiresome for easy tasks that your character should

be able to perform in his sleep. It's even more tiresome when the dice go bonkers and deliver a botch. **Orpheus** employs a simple system to speed play by allowing you to skip dice rolls for actions that your character should routinely perform without effort.

If the number of dice in your character's dice pool equals or exceeds the action's difficulty number, the Storyteller may rule you don't have to roll. The character automatically succeeds. This does not work for all tasks. In particular, this "automatic success rule" *never* applies in combat or other stressful situations. It applies to routine tasks when the character has plenty of time and no major distractions.

What is more, an automatic success is always considered marginal, like rolling just one success on the dice. You may want to roll anyway, in hopes of gaining more successes. For simple and often-repeated actions, though, this system can speed play along and help you move toward the exciting stuff.

You can also add an automatic success to a dice roll by spending a Willpower point (p. 199). You can do this only once in a turn. Since you have a limited number of Willpower points, you can't do this too often, but it may help tremendously when you're under pressure to succeed. Note that this method does not guarantee success: You may still roll enough "1s" to end up with a net failure. Spending Willpower reduces the odds of failure, however, and eliminates any chance of a botch. You must spend the Willpower point before rolling the dice: You may not count your successes or botches and then add a success.

TRYING AGAIN

Failure produces stress. Stress makes it hard to concentrate, which can cause more failure. If a character fails an action, he may usually attempt the task again. For instance, failing once to hotwire a car does not mean that the character can never hotwire the car again. In such cases, however, the Storyteller may increase the second attempt's difficulty number by one. If the character fails again, and tries yet again, the difficulty of the third attempt rises by two, and so on. Eventually, the difficulty rises so high that the character has no chance to succeed or rolls a botch (he can't make heads or tails of the car's wiring; he damages it so the car won't run; he sets off the car alarm; or something equally appropriate). This rule prevents players from plugging away at an action, rolling again and again until their character finally succeeds. Sometimes, in life and afterlife, that just isn't possible.

This rule should not apply to every situation. It certainly does not apply in rapidly changing situations like combat or tailing another driver. In, say, a gunfight, both characters know that not every bullet hits; when the

characters move around, factors like changing distance, cover and the presence of other people make every shot a brand-new challenge — and opportunity.

Example: Holofernes, a Banshee sleeper, attempts a "Christmas Carol" scam to make a rich collector hand over a stolen Mayan mask (legend says the mask has magic powers, so Orpheus wants it). Unfortunately, the collector doesn't believe in moralizing ghosts. Holofernes has already used Forebode to pick out some juicy incidents from the collector's past. He tries using them as proof that because he knows the man's past, he also knows his future. The Storyteller tells Holofernes' player, Pat, to roll Manipulation + Expression (difficulty 6). Pat fails the roll — so the Storyteller says that the collector sneers and says this only proves Holofernes hired a good detective. Holofernes tries to riposte with some tidbit that no one else could know without magic, but now the difficulty rises to 7. Pat rolls and fails again! If Pat tried yet again, the difficulty would rise to 8. Pat decides this is futile, so the frustrated Holofernes turns to Wail instead. He roars, "WHERE'S THE GOD-DAMN MASK!" Only the dice can say whether the collector's courage equals his skepticism....

MULTIPLE ACTIONS

Sometimes a character might attempt two or more actions in a turn. For instance, a character might punch and dodge at the same time, or mull a puzzling statement while charming the Senator's daughter at a party. You can do this, but each action suffers a dice penalty.

The player declares the total number of actions she wants her character to attempt, and what order she rolls for the tasks. She then subtracts that number of dice from the dice pool for the first task. For the second task, she subtracts that number of dice, plus one. For a third task, she subtracts a number of dice equal to the number of tasks plus two. Each additional task suffers the loss of

one more die from the dice pool. If the penalty reduces a dice pool to zero or fewer dice, the character cannot attempt that particular action.

Example: Jeff wants his character, the skimmer Berkeley, to climb a fence while dodging gunfire from a pair of Death Merchants in hot pursuit (Berkeley is in his body so he can't just move through the fence); that's three actions. The nimble Berkeley has Dexterity 5 and Athletics 5. Jeff decides that since he really doesn't want Berkeley hit, he'll dodge first, to maximize his dice pools. Jeff calculates the dice pool for the first dodge (Dexterity 5 + Athletics 5 = 10 dice pool), then subtracts three dice (for the three total actions in this turn), for a dice pool of 7, which is still damn good. The second dodge has a dice pool of 10 (same as before), minus four dice (three for the number of actions, plus one for being the second multiple action), giving a final dice pool of 6. Finally, climbing the fence takes the dice pool of 10, minus five (three for the number of actions, plus two for being the third multiple action), giving a final dice pool of 5. Berkeley should easily escape the two assassins, a luxury most other characters might not have

Ghosts with the Horror called Juggernaut (see p. 111) can make multiple attacks without subtracting dice from their dice pools. These extra actions may not themselves be divided into multiple actions, however.

COMPLICATIONS

The preceding rules are enough to start playing **Orpheus**. They don't cover every situation, though. For instance, what if two characters try pooling their skills to work on a problem? What if one character tries doing something while another character tries stopping her? What if a task is fairly long and difficult, but you don't want to break it up into several smaller actions? The following rules deal with such situations, and so give players and Storytellers more options for resolving the characters'

Action	Example	Description
Simple	Leaping between rooftops; Picking a lock	Complete the task with one roll. The Storyteller announces the difficulty and the player rolls dice. Automatic success is possible.
Extended	Research; Escaping pursuit	Complete the task when you accumulate a certain number of successes, which may require more than one dice roll (which provides more chances of botching).
Resisted	Shadowing; Machismo contests	A contest of skill between two individuals. They compare their numbers of successes. The character with the most successes wins.
Extended & Resisted	Debating	As a resisted action; the contest requires a given number of successes and may take more than one turn to complete. The first person to accumulate a set number of successes in excess of the opponent's accumulated successes wins the contest.

actions. As always in this chapter, these are very general rules. Read on in this chapter for more specific examples of complications and ways to resolve them.

EXTENDED ACTIONS

Sometimes a task requires an extended effort. Breaking a complicated code or swimming across a river takes longer than one turn. If you can accomplish a task with just one success, we call that a *simple action*. If you need

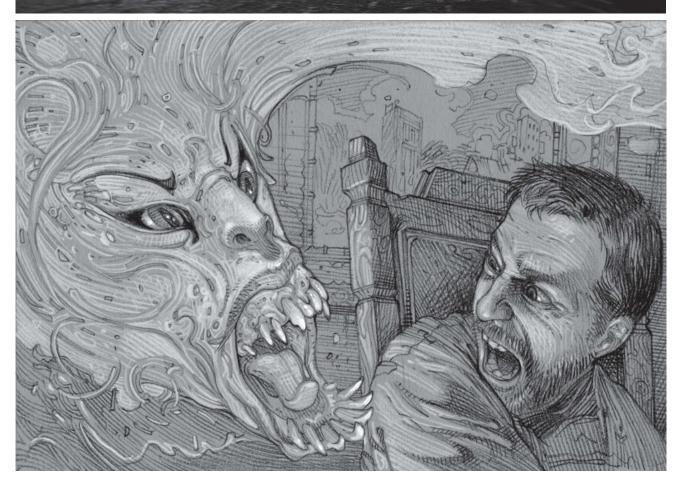
multiple dice rolls to succeed at a lengthy task, however, you undertake an *extended action*. Extended actions often demand that players accumulate many successes.

Suppose, for instance, your character tries shaking three pursuers before he reaches his hideout. The Storyteller says you need 9 successes to escape all three tails — 3 successes per pursuer. Each turn, you roll Wits + Athletics to represent your character's attempts to escape the other characters. You eventually succeed... unless you

EXAMPLE OF EXTENDED ACTION

Holofernes wants to find whoever sold the stolen Mayan mask. Was it a crooked art dealer? A professional fence? He doesn't know, but someone must. The Banshee spends several days talking to art dealers, pawnshop owners and petty crooks while trying to discover who could handle such an item, and who actually did. The Storyteller decides that for Holofernes to succeed, Pat must accumulate 15 successes on an extended Wits + Streetwise roll (difficulty 7; a little hard because most people don't casually admit to knowing about trade in stolen goods). Since legwork takes a long time, each dice roll represents one day's work.

Holofernes has Wits 3 and Streetwise 3, so Pat rolls six dice for each day of legwork. Her first roll generates just one success: A slow start. The roll for the next day, however, nets Holofernes four successes — a solid lead. For the third day, however, Pat rolls 1, 3, 4, 4, 5, 6 — a botch! The Storyteller rules that a shady "arranger" becomes paranoid, pulls a gun and challenges Holofernes to prove he isn't a cop if he wants to live. Since Holofernes isn't in his body, the threat is not completely convincing. If he wants to continue his search, though, the Banshee must either convince the crook or terrify him into submission. More importantly, though, Pat and the Storyteller handled three days' worth of character actions through five minutes of real time and three dice rolls.



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roll a botch, in which case you only think you evaded pursuit and actually lead your tails to your destination.

Botching a roll generally wipes out all your accumulated successes for an extended action. Under some circumstances, the Storyteller might let you start again. Sometimes, however, the Storyteller may rule that your failure is sufficiently complete that you can't start over. In other cases, you may face a time limit. For instance, perhaps you not only need to shake your pursuers, but you must reach your destination by a certain time — so the Storyteller gives you a limited number of turns in which to escape pursuit. In all cases, the Storyteller has final say over which tasks require extended actions.

RESISTED ACTIONS

When two characters oppose each other, a simple difficulty number might not adequately represent their contest. Think of a tug-of-war game: Who wins depends on the strength of both sides. In such cases, you can make a *resisted roll*. Each player rolls dice against a difficulty often determined by one of the opponent's Traits. The person who scores the most successes wins the contest.

It isn't the total number of successes that determines the degree of your victory, however; it's the number by which you exceed your opponent's successes. Each success rolled by your opponent cancels out one of your own, just like "1s" do. So, if you score four successes and your opponent scores three, you win by one net success — a marginal victory. It's difficult to achieve outstanding success in a resisted action unless one person vastly exceeds the other's competence. Even if your opponent cannot beat you outright, he can often diminish your effort's results.

Some actions, like car chases, lengthy debates or riddle contests, may be both extended and resisted. In such cases, one or the other of the opponents must accumulate a certain number of net successes to win the contest; for instance, five or ten more successes than your opponent.

TEAMWORK

Under some circumstances, characters can work together on a problem. For instance, more than one person might translate a book or work on repairing a car. If the Storyteller decides that teamwork is possible for the task in question, two or more characters can roll separately and add their successes together. They can never combine their Traits into one big dice pool, though.

Not every situation allows teamwork. For instance, two characters trying to seduce the same person are *not* better than one. One person's botch may also spoil the entire effort. For breaking down a door, searching for a

EXAMPLE OF

RESISTED ACTION

Holofernes finds the art smuggler who sold the mask and discovers the relic was one of a pair. He slugs the dealer, grabs the mask and jumps in his car. The smuggler and his mooks drive after him, determined to shoot him or force him off the road.

The Storyteller decides the car chase calls for a resisted action between Holofernes and the smuggler: A Dexterity + Drive roll, with the opposing character's Dexterity + Drive total as the difficulty. Holofernes has Dexterity 4 and Drive 2 (total of 6). The smuggler has Dexterity 3 and Drive 4 (total of 7). Thus, Holofernes' player, Pat, rolls 6 dice against difficulty 7 while the Storyteller, representing the smuggler, rolls 7 dice against difficulty 6 (Holofernes' total). The dice love Pat today: They come up 2, 3, 3, 7, 7, 9 for Pat (three successes) compared to 1, 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 8 (one success — note the "1s") for the smuggler. Pat rolls two more successes than the Storyteller did, so Holofernes escapes.

If the Storyteller wanted to draw out the chase, she could demand an extended and resisted action. In this case, Pat and the Storyteller would roll — enlivened by descriptions of squealing tires, sharp turns, racing through red lights and various stunts — until one or the other botches or accumulates five net successes. A victory for Holofernes means he escapes with the mask; a victory for the smuggler means he forces Holofernes off the road; and a botch might mean an accident or police involvement. Here the contest leans more toward the smuggler, since he has the higher dice pool and the lower difficulty. Pat had better think of some clever stratagem for Holofernes, or spend Willpower points, to ensure the Banshee succeeds in his task.

missing person or tossing an apartment in search of clues, though, combining efforts can work very well.

Example: Holofernes and Berkeley want to rescue little Cynthia from a locked room. They can walk through walls, but she can't — she's alive. The two Orpheus operatives don't have a key, so they try breaking down the door. Their players both make Strength rolls (no Abilities really apply); both characters have Strength 2. The Storyteller says they need 3 successes on a single attempt to break the stout wooden door. Holofernes and Berkely both slam into the door at once. If one player scores two successes while the other scores one, the two agents smash open the locked door.

THE GOLDEN RULE

This is the big one, bigger even than the rules for rolling dice: Use the rules you want, to run the game you

want. The rules for **Orpheus** are not some great, abstract system that you must obey in every detail. They are merely *tools*. As Storyteller, you have the right to pick the right tool for the job at hand. Suppose, for instance, that you and your players enjoy classic mysteries in the Agatha Christie model, in which the characters gather clues, talk to suspects and witnesses and try solving a crime through logic and insight. The characters use their ghostly powers chiefly as a way to investigate. Such a game could be almost diceless. At the other extreme, a game about ghostly secret agents who battle murderous gangs of criminals or terrorists, rescue hostages and save people from crazed and evil ghosts might run like a war game, with the dice as everpresent arbiters of success or failure.

You can also change rules if they impede your game. If you think ghosts should have different powers, or their Traits should work differently, go ahead and change them. While we certainly hope you find every word of this book useful for your game, it's a Storyteller's privilege to tinker with the rules and the setting. Just be sure to discuss changes to the rules with your players, *in advance*, so that everyone operates on the same assumptions.

The Golden Rule includes a smaller-scale application that you should also discuss with your players: Ask them if they want you to fudge dice rolls for the sake of the plot. Sometimes you may want to ensure that characters find a particular clue — or lose a particular fight. Some players don't mind this, as long as they are sure the Storyteller doesn't screw them over just to be nasty or turn the players' characters into puppets of his own will. Other players insist that the verdict of the dice is final and if a lucky roll spoils a plot — whether by giving the characters an unexpectedly easy victory or an improbable failure — then so be it.

In the same spirit, ask players if they mind if you change your plot to make a cooler story, or if they want you to design a predefined set of challenges. Players often speculate about what's happening. Their ideas may be so clever and cool that you like them more than what you planned yourself. Should you change your plot to incorporate such ideas, or prove the players wrong no matter how good a story it would make? Again, players differ in their opinions. Some think that anything is justified if it makes a fun story, while others feel that the Storyteller should remain a neutral arbiter of an objective world. They'd rather waste time on blind alleys or fail outright than suspect the Storyteller helped them succeed.

TRY IT OUT

There you have the core rule system of **Orpheus**. Everything else is just elaboration on how to apply those rules in particular cases. Now try them out with dice rolls for some typical situations.

First let's try a simple action in a combat situation. Two thugs corner Holofernes in an alley and he wants to shoot one of them with his Glock 17 pistol. The thug is at short range, so the difficulty to hit him is 6 (see later in this chapter for more details on combat). Take three dice for Holofernes' Dexterity of 3, and two for his Firearms Skill of 2. You have five dice in your dice pool—not great, but good. Now roll. Count your successes, but remember to take away a success for every "1" you rolled. Are there any successes left? Did you botch? The more successes you roll, the more effective the shot is, and the greater the chance that the thug falls or runs away instead of returning fire.

Now try an extended and resisted action. Holofernes and the shady financier Willem van Sinz both try seducing the international supermodel Velvet Peakes at a party in Monte Carlo (the Storyteller is on a James Bond kick). This requires a variety of rolls involving different Traits and difficulties. The lovely Miss Peakes leaves the party on the arm of whichever character accumulates five net successes. This requires an indefinite series of rolls. We give Holofernes and van Sinz these Traits:

Holofernes: Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Empathy 2, Etiquette 3, Subterfuge 4.

Van Sinz: Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Empathy 2, Etiquette 4, Subterfuge 3.

- First roll (approach/opening remarks): Each player rolls Appearance + Subterfuge against a difficulty of Velvet's Wits + Empathy. A failure indicates that Velvet spots the come-on and doesn't like it; a botch means a drink in the face and that rolls for the other character are no longer opposed. Holofernes' player has a dice pool of 7, van Sinz of 5, and difficulty 6 for both.
- Second roll (charm and taste): As Holofernes and van Sinz both try impressing Velvet with their savoir-faire, each player rolls Charisma + Etiquette at a difficulty of the other characters' dice pool. This gives Holofernes' player a dice pool of 6 at difficulty 7, and van Sinz's a dice pool of 7 at difficulty 6.
- Third roll and any subsequent ones (flirting, dancing and cutting out the other guy): While Velvet trades dances between the two characters, both players roll Manipulation + Empathy, with the opponent's Charisma + Subterfuge as the difficulty. Holofernes has a dice pool of 4 (difficulty 6) and van Sinz has a dice pool of 6 (difficulty 7).

Try it out a few times and see who wins more often — Holofernes or van Sinz?

EXAMPLES OF ROLLS

Between nine Attributes and 36 Abilities, you can make 324 different dice pools — and that's not even including Backgrounds, Virtues and additional Abilities

that you define yourself. Admittedly, it's hard to imagine what combinations like Appearance + Technology or Strength + Linguistics would *mean*, but you can find Trait combinations and dice rolls to simulate an enormous range of possible actions. These examples of rolls can give you an idea of some possibilities that might arise in the course of a game.

- You get in a macho contest, squeezing hard while shaking hands to see who winces and lets go first. Both characters roll Strength + Intimidation (difficulty of the other character's Strength + 3) for a resisted action.
- You jump for the fire escape, your only possible retreat from the pursuing Death Merchants. Roll Strength + Athletics to reach the fire escape and pull yourself up.
- An enormous boulder blocks the entrance to the cave, but perhaps you can lever it away. Roll Strength + Science (difficulty 6) to find a good leverage point.
- You're in a knife fight with a gangbanger. Roll Dexterity + Melee to attack.
- Can you palm that strange medallion from Lord Wensleydale's collection without him noticing? Roll Dexterity + Subterfuge to find out.
- You try picking a lock with the proverbial hairpin
 but it's a very good lock. Roll Dexterity + Security (difficulty 8).
- You need to learn the names and appearances of all the major Tibetan demons within 24 hours. Fortunately, the local university has a large collection of Tibetan religious lore. Roll Stamina + Academics to read it all, stay awake and remember it later.
- Agents from Terrel and Squib capture you and use "truth drugs" in their attempt to squeeze Orpheus trade secrets from you. Pit your Stamina + Meditation against the interrogator's Manipulation + Medicine in this extended and resisted action. The first character to accumulate five net successes wins the contest.
- Safety is just three miles away... but it's cold, so cold. Can you reach shelter before you freeze and become a ghost permanently? Roll Stamina + Survival (difficulty 7) three times in hopes of accumulating five successes, while each failed roll means the difficulty rises by one.
- Breaking into old Professor McCready's house would be easy if it weren't for his pit bull, and as an animal-lover you don't want to kill it. Roll Charisma + Animal Ken (difficulty 7) once per day as an extended action. The dog accepts you as a friend once you accumulate ten successes.
- Even after you increase the drone's Vitality, it's hard to pry a straight answer from him but in life, he knew the information you need now. Keeping the feeble ghost focused and friendly requires a Charisma + Empathy roll.

- "Who, me, officer? I was just walking by, minding my own business...." Roll Charisma + Subterfuge to convince the cop you're an innocent bystander.
- That mook knows more than he's telling, but you think you can catch him in his lies and browbeat him into telling the truth. This calls for an extended and resisted action, your Manipulation + Investigation against the mook's Wits + Subterfuge. If you accumulate five net successes, the mook breaks; if he accumulates five net successes, he convinces you he "don't know nuthin'."
- The city clerk says the records you seek are confidential. Roll Manipulation + Law to convince him you have a right to see them.
- The blips who captured you cling to a crazed, evil, but incredibly vital and charismatic ghost. Can you inspire one of them to break free and help you escape? Roll Manipulation + Leadership (difficulty 8).
- You know the man at the hotel bar is an off-duty Death Merchant. If your look and manner put him at ease, maybe you can learn something. Roll Appearance + Subterfuge to socialize without revealing your own secrets.
- How did your crucible talk you into appearing in a wet T-shirt contest? And why? Oh, well. Roll Appearance + Performance to put on a good show for the crowd.
- The trail of clues leads you to a punk club. Can you assemble the right clothes, accessories and even manners to help you fit in? Roll Appearance + Streetwise.
- Romantic artist and poet William Blake drew portraits of angels, ghosts and spirits. Is this Blake print real, and therefore of interest to Orpheus, or is it a forgery? Roll Perception + Academics to judge its authenticity.
- While watching the city council meeting as an unseen spook, you try mapping the currents of power and deference. Roll Perception + Politics.
- That crackpot's ghost trap really works! Too bad you're in it. Can you figure out how to break the machine from the inside? Roll Perception + Technology (difficulty 8).
- The leaders of the cult write their missives in code. Roll Intelligence + Enigmas as an extended action, one roll per day of effort. Five successes mean you break the code.
- Orpheus' management hopes you have a very good reason for "borrowing" the company helicopter. You know, the one that you wrecked. Roll Intelligence + Expression (difficulty 8) to justify your actions.
- It's awfully suspicious how sick your informant became right before your meeting. Roll Intelligence + Medicine (difficulty 6) to recognize a poisoning.
- Sure, the World Wide Web holds amazing stores of obscure information... but can you find it amid all the irrelevant dreck? Roll Wits + Computer to arrive at a good search strategy.

- Lord Wensleydale's quip has everyone laughing at your expense. Roll Wits + Etiquette to make a suitably clever rejoinder that turns the tables on His Lordship.
- What the hell are those crazy cultists talking about? Oh well, as long as you can make them *think* you understand.... Roll Wits + Occult to answer their gibberish with plausible gibberish of your own.

GAME TERMS

Players and Storytellers must know these terms to understand many of this game's rules. They describe the mechanics of the Storyteller System. For the special jargon unique to **Orpheus** characters, see the Lexicon (p. 18).

- Ability: These Traits describe specific areas of training, education or practice, rather than the intrinsic strengths and weaknesses of a character's body or psychology. Typical Abilities include Athletics, Law and Stealth.
- Action: An action is a consciously willed deed anything from throwing a punch to fast-talking a security guard. When a player says a character does something, the character takes an action.
- Advantage: A miscellaneous category of Traits that includes character Backgrounds and Horrors.
- Attribute: These Traits represent a character's raw competence or lack of competence at pursuing matters. Characters have three *Physical* Attributes (Strength, Dexterity and Stamina) to represent what they can do with their bodies; three *Mental* Attributes (Perception, Intelligence and Wits) to represent what they can do with their minds; and three *Social* Attributes (Charisma, Manipulation and Appearance) to represent how well they interact with others.
- Background: Most of these Traits represent a character's social connections, possessions and privileges. Unlike most other Traits, Backgrounds can rise and fall easily. Examples include Allies, Artifact and Wealth.
- Botch: A disastrous failure, indicated by rolling one or more "1s" and no successes.
- Character: Each player creates a made-up person whom he roleplays in a chronicle. Although "character" could mean any of the made-up people in an Orpheus game, we usually mean the players' characters. Other characters are called *supporting characters*.
- Chronicle: A linked series of stories about a set of characters. Some characters may leave the chronicle because they die or quit, and new characters join; some characters, plots and situations connect the new stories to previous game sessions.
- Dice Pool: The number of dice you roll to discover whether a character succeeds at an action or not. The number of dice in a pool is based on a Trait rating, or the sum of two Trait ratings.

- **Difficulty:** A number from 2 to 10 describing how hard a task is to accomplish. For a character to succeed in a challenging action, the player must roll that number or higher on at least one die in his dice pool.
- **Downtime:** The time spent between scenes. This usually involves routine activities like traveling, preparing equipment or characters spending time with their families. Although characters can pursue actions during downtime, the players and Storyteller handle downtime through quick questions, instructions and descriptions instead of roleplaying.
- Experience Points: Points your Storyteller gives your character after each story. These represent how characters become more competent through practice. You can spend Experience Points to raise your character's Traits or add new Traits.
- Extended Action: An action requiring a certain number of successes, accumulated through multiple dice rolls over multiple turns, for the character to succeed at the task.
- Failure: A die that rolls a number less than a task's difficulty rating. Also, the result of a dice roll in which no successes appear, but neither are there any "1s" to create a botch. This means your character simply fails at a task.
- Health: This Trait measures how much damage a living character or skimmer has taken. The more injuries a character suffers, the lower her Health score drops.
- **Points:** The temporary score of a Trait like Will-power or Vitality. The **Orpheus** character sheet indicates Trait points through squares. Some actions involve the character expending points of a Trait.
- Rating: The permanent value of a Trait. This is usually a number from 1 to 5, but some Traits are rated from 1 to 10. The **Orpheus** character sheet indicates Trait ratings through circles.
- Reflexive: Some situations involve the player rolling dice, but the character not actually taking an action. Examples include soak rolls and Willpower rolls to resist mind control.
- Resisted Action: An action in which two characters pit their Traits against each other. Both players compare their number of successes rolled. Whoever has more successes wins.
- Scene: A single episode within a story, in which actions and events take place. Scenes usually happen in a small area and over a brief period of time.
- Score: The temporary value of a Trait or combination of Traits used in a single dice roll.
- Simple Action: A task requiring the player to roll just one success for the character to win, though more successes indicate a greater degree of accomplishment.

- **Spite:** A Trait measuring a character's fear, anger, self-loathing and other destructive emotions. Calling upon this powerful psychic force carries dangers for characters.
- Story: A series of scenes in which characters encounter a situation, react to it and reach some sort of resolution. A story usually occupies at least one game session.
- Storyteller: The person who plays the roles of all supporting characters (those not created by the players) and determines all events beyond the control of the players and their characters. The Storyteller creates the initial situation of a story and the settings in which the characters act, but the players and the Storyteller together are involved in how the story develops.
- Success: A die roll that yields a number greater than or equal to a difficulty rating. If a die roll includes at least one success, the character succeeds at a task.
- System: A standardized set of rules explaining what dice to roll in a particular situation and how to interpret the result.
- Trait: Any aspect of a character that can be represented as a number or some other game mechanic. Attributes and Abilities are Traits; so is a character's Nature. How a character talks is not a Trait, even though it may be quite important.
- **Troupe:** The group of players, including the Storyteller, who play **Orpheus**.
- Turn: The smallest unit of dramatic action in Orpheus; the time it takes a character to perform one discrete task.
- Vitality: A Trait measuring a character's strength of being, will to live and emotional connection to other beings. It fuels most of a ghost's or projected entity's supernatural powers.
- Willpower: A measure of a character's self-confidence, internal control and drive to succeed. Unlike most Traits, Willpower is expended as well as rolled.

DRAMATIC SYSTEMS

The actions and interactions of the main characters — in this case, the crucible — are the meat and drink of any good story. They feed it, sustain it and help it grow until it adopts a life of its own. The Storyteller's job is providing a stage upon which the characters can act, guiding the characters through their scenes and describing the imaginary consequences of their actions. The last of these duties relies heavily on whether the characters succeed or fail.

Dramatic systems simplify this job by providing rules for several common activities. In general, when a character attempts to accomplish a task, he simply

rolls a number of dice equal to an Attribute added to an Ability [Attribute + Ability], as determined by the Storyteller. Further, if the action falls under one of the character's specialties, he may roll an extra die for each "10" rolled on the initial roll, as well as any "10s" on subsequent rolls.

The systems below are by no means exhaustive. That said, the information herein provides a solid foundation upon which you can base your decisions when your players throw you a curve. Many of these systems also resolve over the course of several turns, and require multiple actions during that time. Player characters may attempt some again if the first try fails, though further efforts may incur a difficulty penalty, as per the Storyteller's judgment.

AUTOMATICFEATS

Like reflexives, automatic feats don't require dice rolls. They do cost your character an action, however. They take time and attention to perform successfully and quickly. Under normal circumstances, these feats are simple enough that no roll is required, as success is automatic.

- Getting to Your Feet: Characters may rise from a prone or seated position, provided they are not hindered from doing so. In combat or any other situation where it matters this requires one full action and takes the character's turn. The character may attempt a second action at the same time, though the multiple-action rule is in force: Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 4) to stand successfully.
- Manifesting: The characters may manifest to the living and "disperse" back to incorporeal and invisible, but both transitions require concentration to accomplish (whether to invest Vitality and appear or to slip back outside human perception). Characters using this technique while dodging incoming attacks may apply the multiple-action rule, with a simple Willpower roll (difficulty 7) to manifest or disperse.
- Movement: Characters may walk, jog or run. When walking, a character moves seven yards in one turn. Jogging increases this pace to (12 + Dexterity) yards per turn, whereas running increases it to (20 + [3 x Dexterity]) yards per turn.

Any character may move up to half his maximum running speed and *still* take another action in the same turn. This is not considered a multiple action, but the Storyteller may assign a penalty to the second action's difficulty number or to the character's dice pool. Conversely, a character attempting a second action *while* running (like diving for cover while firing his pistol) suffers a -1 penalty to his dice pool for each yard covered.

As discussed previously (see Health, p. 200, 233), injured characters may not move at maximum speed.

- Projecting for Skimmers: If a skimmer possesses the Meditation Skill, he can project within a single turn; otherwise, he requires a full minute to project. In emergency cases where the skimmer is trying to project in a turn without Meditation or he's using multiple actions with Meditation, the player must succeed at a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) as part of the multiple-actions rule.
- Readying a Weapon: Readying a weapon, whether the character draws it for the first time or reloads it, requires a full action. Generally, this requires no roll, though certain circumstances (like attempting a simultaneous action) may require it. In these instances, the Storyteller may assign a dice pool reduction for the other action. Alternatively, she may require you to roll Dexterity + Melee or Firearms (difficulty 4) to ready the weapon. In particularly stressful situations, both the reduction and the roll might apply.
- Starting a Car: Under normal conditions, starting a car requires an action, but no roll. Of course, if a character is frightened, rushed or otherwise distracted, the Storyteller may ask for a Wits + Drive roll (difficulty 4), if only to ensure he doesn't drop his keys or worse, flood the engine. Naturally, hot-wiring a car is tougher, requiring a Perception + Technology (difficulty 7) roll.
- Using Benefits: While Benefits do not need a dice roll on either the donor's or beneficiary's part, they do occupy a full action, prohibiting the character from pursuing multiple actions during that turn. In essence, donating a Benefit requires the donor's full attention.
- Yielding: The Initiative rules decide whether you act first in a given situation (p. 226), but do not force you to. You may yield your turn to a character or characters following you in Initiative order, and so act once the characters you've yielded to complete their actions. If everyone yields during a turn, no one does anything and play proceeds to the next turn.

PHYSICAL FEATS

These systems encompass actions revolving around the three physical Attributes (Strength, Dexterity and Stamina), and usually require a roll.

• Climbing [Dexterity + Athletics]: When your character climbs an inclined surface (ranging from a steep slope to the face of a building), roll Dexterity + Athletics. Unless the character is covering a very short distance, this is an extended roll. An average climb with sturdy handholds and minimal complications allows the character to move 10 feet for every success. At the Storyteller's discretion, the character may increase or decrease his climb speed, thus costing the player a penalty of one to the difficulty to move 15 feet per success or granting her a bonus of one to move five feet per success. The base difficulty is modified by several factors,

including the number of handholds, smoothness of the surface and even the weather. The extended action lasts until you've gained enough successes to reach the desired height. Botching a climbing roll means your character may slip, become stuck or even fall.

Finally, appropriate gear (like rock-climbing gear or a rope) can lower the difficulty on a Climbing roll, per the Storyteller's judgment. Further, certain Horrors (like Juggernaut) may lower the difficulty in the same way or even obviate the need for a roll entirely.

• Driving [Dexterity/Wits + Drive]: Storytellers may assume that all adult characters can drive an automatic transmission car in normal traffic, though driving a standard requires a minimum of one dot in Drive. If a character is simply driving from point A to point B, the Storyteller may forgo rolls, though bad weather, high speed, obstacles and complex maneuvers all conspire to increase the difficulty, thereby incurring a roll.

This roll's difficulty increases as conditions deteriorate. Heavy rain, for example, might increase the difficulty by one, it may rise by two under icy conditions. These modifiers are cumulative, so driving on a flat tire (add one to difficulty) in heavy traffic (add one to difficulty) means a total difficulty modifier of two. Driving long distances (or even short distances in particularly rough conditions) may require an extended roll, whereas attempting to elude pursuit is a contested (and usually extended) roll.

If the player fails a Drive roll, the car's passengers are in trouble. The player must make a second roll (Wits + Drive) to determine whether the vehicle crashes or simply spins out of control. In the former case, each passenger suffers two dice of bashing damage, plus an additional die of bashing damage for each 10 mph the car was traveling over the vehicle's safe speed (which varies).

If the vehicle spins out of control, any Drive roll for that vehicle in the following turn suffers a penalty of three to the difficulty modifier (in addition to any other modifiers). Alternately, the driver may stop the vehicle and wait a turn before continuing and suffer no further penalties.

Finally, a botch on this roll means a major catastrophe occurs; perhaps the axle breaks, or the brakes fail or traffic conspires against the characters. Regardless, a major collision occurs. Characters in the vehicle suffer damage as indicated previously, except the damage is lethal rather than bashing.

• Encumbrance [Strength]: Too often, the maxim "the right tool for the right job," becomes "Every tool for the right job." Although characters should be prepared, it's simply impossible to carry everything one might need for every eventuality. Often, Storytellers can (and should) ignore these rules without a problem, though if the characters pack everything they own every time they leave the house, it's time to make their lives difficult.

VEHICLE TYPES

Different vehicles have different characteristics. This chart details several common vehicle types a character may attempt to drive. For every 10 mph over the safe speed, increase the Drive roll's difficulty by one. As discussed under Driving, the road's conditions and vehicle in question may further modify the difficulty.

The Maneuver column dictates the *maximum* number of dice you may have in your dice pool for a character in control of the vehicle indicated. This represents the vehicle's limits. The best driver in the world won't win a stock car race with a tank.

Vehicle	Safe	Max	Maneuver
	Speed	Speed	
Bus	60	100	3
18-Wheeler	70	100	4
6-Wheel Truck	60	90	3
Tank (modern)	60	100	4
Tank (WWII)	30	40	3
Compact	70	130	6
Sporty Compact	100	140	7
Sedan	70	120	5
Luxury Sedan	85	155	7
SUV	70	115	6
Midsize	75	125	6
Minivan	70	120	6
Sport Coupe	110	150	8
Sports Car	110	160	8
Formula-One Racer	140	240	10

A character can carry 25 pounds per dot of Strength he possesses without penalty. Should he exceed this total, every physical action the character attempts adds one to the difficulty due to the added weight. Further, for every 25 pounds in excess of the character's weight allowance, his base movement is halved (rounding down). Characters carrying twice their weight allowance can't move at all.

Weight notwithstanding, some objects are simply too awkward to carry any great distance. A character toting around a couple of wicker chairs might not exceed his weight allowance, but his movement should still suffer. As usual, this is the Storyteller's call.

• Intrusion [Dexterity/Perception + Security]: Intrusion includes both bypassing someone's electronic and mechanical security measures and preventing intruders from circumventing your own. Possible actions include evading or installing detection devices (cameras, motion

detectors and the like), cracking or concealing safes, and picking or designing the perfect lock.

To breach someone's security, the character must succeed at his first attempt if an active security system is present. Failure means a camera recorded his presence, he set off an alarm or he activated automatic defense systems — possibly all three. Provided no such measures are in place (as when attempting to pick a padlock on a condemned building), the character may continue trying. The difficulty on an Intrusion roll ranges from 5 to 9, depending on the impregnability of the location: an abandoned warehouse is easier to break into than the White House. Certain rolls may require a minimum number of dots (usually one and no more than three) in the Security skill, along with tools appropriate to the task. On a botch, the character bungles the attempt and lands in hot water immediately — guards arrive, the facility locks down, etc.

When attempting to install a security system, the player need make only a single roll. The difficulty of all attempts to bypass your security measures is equal to 6 + the number of successes you rolled in installing the system. If the player botches the installation of the security devices, then intruders require no roll to penetrate the area: The padlock didn't close, the motion sensors never engaged or the cameras weren't recording.

• Jumping [Strength, or Strength + Athletics for a running jump]: Characters can attempt a simple jump roll against difficulty 3. Characters leap two feet vertically or four feet horizontally for each success. If the distance leaped doesn't carry the character to his destination, he fails the attempt and falls short. Often, this isn't a problem, but if the character is leaping from rooftop to rooftop, he's in trouble. On a failure, the character may attempt a Dexterity + Athletics roll (or Wits + Athletics; usually difficulty 6) to snag a ledge or other handhold, and prevent himself from falling. A botch, however, means the character falls. Depending on the height of the fall and the surface on which the character lands, he may be seriously injured or even die.

Prior to any jump roll, the character may try gauging the distance he's attempting to leap. A successful Perception + Athletics roll (difficulty 6) accurately determines the number of successes required for the jump.

• Lifting/Breaking [Strength]: Under the right conditions, people are capable of strength feats above and beyond their normal capacity. A character's Strength dictates what he may lift or break, as indicated on the table below. If the Storyteller feels the character has enough adrenaline, drugs or sheer determination to gain a little extra "oomph," however, he may ask for a Willpower roll, difficulty 9. Each success adds one dot to the character's strength for this action only (for extended actions, the

character must make this roll each turn during which he attempts to lift an object).

That said, the human body can only sustain so much abuse. Bones break before a cinder block wall does. The more difficult feats on the chart below assume the use of a blunt object or lever of some sort, like a hammer or crowbar.

If the character fails the action, nothing happens. He simply cannot lift or break the object in question. On a botch, the character suffers damage thanks to strained muscles, a broken bone or simply dropping the object on his toes. When attempting to lift an object off another character, the pinned victim might suffer the additional damage instead.

Several characters can work together to lift or break an object. Individual players roll separately, per the Teamwork rules (p. 213) and combine their successes. Their combined Strength scores determine their capabilities without considering the Willpower rolls. That said, the target object must be of sufficient size for more than one character to contribute; this is not an issue when lifting heavy objects since they are generally large. Only one character, however, may attempt to tear free a steel rivet (for example).

Strength	Feat	Lift
1	Break a window	40 lbs.
2	Break a wooden chair	100 lbs.
3	Break open a wooden crate	250 lbs.
4	Snap a 2-by-4 board	400 lbs.
5	Bend open steel chain links	650 lbs.
6	Break a steel fence	800 lbs.
7	Overturn a small car	900 lbs.
8	Bend steel bars	1,000 lbs.
9	Break through a cement wal	l 1,200 lbs.
10	Tear free steel rivets	1,500 lbs.
11	Bend 1" sheet metal	2,000 lbs.
12	Break a metal lamp post	3,000 lbs.
13	Overturn a station wagon	4,000 lbs.
14	Overturn a van	5,000 lbs.
15	Overturn a truck	6,000 lbs.

• Opening/Closing [Strength]: To break down a door requires a Strength roll (difficulty 6 to 8, depending on the door's sturdiness). Standard, locked wooden doors need only a single success to force open or slam shut. A reinforced door may call for as many as 10 successes, however, while a vault door may require as many as 20. If the door requires several attempts to batter down, the Storyteller can rule this an extended action with the character slamming into the door repeatedly until it breaks. If another character is holding the door closed (or forcing it open while you're trying to keep it shut),

this is a contested roll. A botch may cause a health level of bashing damage when the character bruises his shoulder, or he can simply give up (disallowing further attempts as "too tough").

As with most actions, teamwork helps (though Storytellers should keep the size of the door in mind: No more than two characters can attempt to force open a standard door, while a large vault door allows several characters access). Particularly sturdy doors might require a minimum Strength score to even dent (see the Lifting/Breaking chart for examples). This system applies any time a character attempts to force a portal open or closed, including not only doors, but locked cabinets, boarded windows or jammed manhole covers.

• Pursuit [Dexterity + Athletics/Drive]: Espionage and horror stories commonly feature chase scenes, so the Storyteller should expect some to pop up in his own stories. If the participants have radically different movement values, the chase likely ends before it begins. Occasionally, however, the situation at hand tips the equation one way or the other, and a far slower character may escape (or catch) one who is ordinarily much faster. The most obvious example of this is a ghost pursuing a human; after all, it's difficult to escape someone who simply passes through walls and other obstacles!

A basic pursuit is an extended action, wherein both sides roll over the course of several turns to determine who accumulates a pre-determined number of successes first. In this case, the victor either escapes or catches his quarry, depending upon which side of the chase he was on. In such chases, the prey receives several free successes at the beginning of the chase, determined by the length of his head start. On foot, the character receives one success for every two yards he begins the chase in advance; in a car or other vehicle, this becomes one success for every ten yards. When a ghost or projected entity pursues a human (or, somewhat more unusually, vice versa), the Storyteller should remember that spooks do not tire, while humans become fatigued and winded.

Once the pursued character (or "rabbit") accumulates the requisite successes for escape, the pursuer (or "hound") should make a Wits + Perception roll (difficulty 6 + the number of successes beyond the target number of dice the pursued character achieved). If the pursuer's player fails this roll, the quarry escapes in a crowd, ducks down a side street or loses his pursuer in a maze of corridors and side passages. If the pursuer's player botches the roll, not only does the rabbit escape, but the pursuer may not find him again in that locale — he's simply hidden himself too well. If, on the other hand, the rabbit botches any of his pursuit rolls, he rounds a corner only to face a dead end, or perhaps he simply trips and falls. Either way, the hound catches him.

• Shadowing [Dexterity + Stealth/Drive]: Shadowing is the fine art of tailing someone so as not to be spotted, yet keeping the target in sight. This system works for targets oblivious to the hound and those actively trying to lose their new shadow.

Storytellers can handle this system in a variety of ways, depending on the situation. The Storyteller can call for a resisted action and ask for a roll with the difficulty based on the target's Perception + Alertness, to remain out of sight. Alternatively, the Storyteller may ask for the same roll, but with a difficulty based on the target's Dexterity + Stealth or Drive, if the rabbit suspects he's being followed. Stalker and victim should both roll, and whoever's player scores more successes is the victor, as usual. A tie indicates the hound remains undetected.

A shadowing action may also be an extended action, drawing the cat-and-mouse game out over several turns. To make the roll quick and simple, the Storyteller simply assigns a base difficulty of six (modified by the environment as normal), rather than basing the difficulty upon the opponent's dice pool. In such cases, the quarry must score at least one more success than his shadow to spot the stalker. Hounds who trained together may have their rolls combined into one success total through teamwork.

- Sneaking [Dexterity + Stealth]: Projector agents often consider stealth their foremost concern. Even ghosts and projecting entities, however, cannot simply remain invisible (barring certain Horrors and Stains) if confronting another element of the supernatural. Regardless, when a character sneaks, hides or otherwise conceals his presence, roll Dexterity + Stealth as a resisted action against Perception + Alertness rolls for anyone in the area who has a chance of spotting him. The difficulty on both rolls is 6, though darkness, background noise and similar concerns may modify one or both difficulties appropriately. Lack of cover, high tech surveillance gear and the like modify the Stealth difficulty, while darkness or crowds modify the spotter's difficulty. If the sneaking character fails, he isn't automatically discovered, though the opposition gains a bonus to subsequent rolls to locate him (indicated by lowering the difficulty to spot him, or by alerting others of his presence without divulging his location). On a botch, however, the character may round a corner and stumble right into the arms of a guard detachment.
- Swimming [Stamina + Athletics]: A character must have one dot in Athletics to know how to swim, or he sinks like a stone. Short swims require no roll, while long distance or duration swims do need rolls. Such an attempt is an extended action, the difficulty modified by the character's pace, the weather and rough waters. The Storyteller may require several rolls to reach the destination (or to stay afloat for the time period attempted);



if any of these fail, the character may falter (suffering drowning damage) and the player lose some of his accumulated successes or have to make additional rolls. The character may thus have been caught in a rip tide, tangled in seaweed or inhale a mouthful of water. On a botch, worse trouble arises: The character's leg cramps, a shark decides he makes a tasty meal or he simply passes out from exertion and begins drowning.

• Throwing [Dexterity + Athletics]: When a character attempts to throw an object, whether at a stationary target or otherwise, distance and accuracy determine whether the target is struck. A character may throw any object of three pounds or less up to a distance equal to his (Strength x 5) yards. For every two pounds over three, the overall distance drops by five yards. If the character picks up an object, but the possible throwing distance is zero yards or less, he simply dumps it to one side; it cannot be hurled.

The Storyteller may reduce or increase throwing distances based on the object in question — the character can throw a baseball much more readily than a lamp, for example. To throw an object, roll Dexterity + Athletics against a difficulty of 6 (if the target is within half the maximum range) or 7 (if the target is between half and maximum range). Crosswinds, small targets or distraction may further modify the difficulty. On a botch, the character might strike an innocent bystander or herself, or the target might catch the projectile.

MENTALFEATS

These systems govern tasks involving the three Mental Attributes (Perception, Intelligence and Wits). Dice rolls related to these Attributes sometimes include Willpower, as well. As always, difficulties vary based on the situation.

• Hacking [Intelligence/Wits + Computer]: Computers are valuable tools for any modern organization. In Orpheus' business — often the business of intelligence gathering and dissemination — they are indispensable. For a character to hack into a computer, he must roll Intelligence or Wits (depending on the time allowed for the attempt) + Computers against a difficulty based on the complexity of the target system, as well as the security measures protecting it. Standard systems, like home PCs or low level office computers, incur a difficulty of 6, while systems belonging to the military or high level business personnel may drive the difficulty as high as 10. The number of successes achieved dictates the number of dice the character may use while interacting with the hacked system.

If another user (or the system itself) is actively blocking access, both sides roll for resisted actions. The participant who achieves the most successes wins. On a botch, the character's activities might be traced to his physical loca-

tion, or he might have left telltale "hacker fingerprints," allowing investigators to identify his handiwork.

While some systems allow for remote access (and therefore, remote hacking), many computers are simply not wired for outside access, or are protected by a firewall. In the latter case, the difficulty of the hack increases, perhaps by one or two, unless the character attempts it from the terminal itself. In the former case, it is simply impossible to break into the system from a remote location.

- Investigation [Perception + Investigation]: Searching a scene for fingerprints, running ballistics on a spent slug and determining a stiff's cause of death are all governed by an Investigation roll. The Storyteller may call for an extended roll when only one clue exists to be found, with the character methodically searching the scene. When more than one clue awaits, a simple action is usually appropriate (the number of successes determines how many clues are uncovered). One success reveals a few minor clues (which may even seem contradictory), while multiple successes reveal several important clues (if not one major tidbit); the character may make a leap of intuition linking one or more of them. Provided the location being investigated is large enough (an alley as opposed to a closet, for example), teamwork certainly helps. On a botch, the character draws false conclusions from clues he's uncovered, or even destroys clues by mistake.
- Repair [Dexterity/Perception + Crafts/Technology]: Used to repair fouled or broken items, the Craft and Technology skills can also help create such items from scratch, provided the character has the appropriate specialties. This covers everything from basket weaving to television repair, though if a character actually attempts to build a TV, the Storyteller should require a minimum number of dots in the Technology skill (probably 4 or 5, with an appropriate specialty). Of course, diagnosis comes before cure, so to repair a given item, a character must first determine the problem. While a broken picture tube is somewhat obvious, who knows why the VCR keeps eating your tape? It could be anything from a bad sprocket to another ghost possessing the VCR as a practical joke. Once the character pins down the problem, the Storyteller determines the difficulty of the repair. This depends on the severity of the malfunction, the complexity of the broken item, and the availability of parts and tools. It should also be noted that while it's easy to fill a crack in a vase, it's quite difficult to repair such a thing so that it appears undamaged. An impressive research roll (into appropriate techniques) may reduce the difficulty, when appropriate.

As a rule of thumb, routine repairs like cleaning a VCR or changing a tire have a difficulty of 4, while rebuilding an engine or rewiring a VCR may have difficulties as high

as 9. The amount of time required to repair an item is up to the Storyteller, who can treat the repair as an extended action. On a botch, the character injures himself, or damages the object beyond repair (perhaps both).

- Research [Intelligence + Occult/Science]: Your character knows where to look when in need of information, whether in the library, on the Internet by studying maps or simply through interviewing the right people. This often takes time and effort, though the nature of the task (you either find the information or not) means this feat requires only one roll. The time required is entirely up to the Storyteller; obscure information should be more difficult to track down, obviously. The number of successes gained indicates how much information the researcher uncovers and how useful it is. One success reveals only basic information (the address of an old friend), while multiple successes provide more detail (the old friend married four years ago and has a child, the couple is seeing a relationship counselor, etc.). The Storyteller may adjust the difficulty based on the availability of the information. Botched research attempts leave the character stumped or even bring misleading information.
- Tracking [Perception + Survival]: Whereas shadowing is the art of following a person, tracking is the art of following his trail, regardless how old. This usually involves spotting signs of the target's passage, like broken twigs, footprints, tire marks or a trail of burnt matches left by a heavy smoker. Tracking is usually an extended action, wherein the tracking character must accumulate a certain number of successes to follow his quarry. Many circumstances can modify difficulty, including recent snow, mud, hard packed soil, etc. Failure on any individual roll means the tracker lost the trail and must begin again. A botch means the character not only lost the trail ahead, but spoiled the trail behind; he loses his prey.

The player may also attempt a tracking roll as a single roll while her character pauses to gather more information on her quarry. In this case, multiple successes could reveal details like the target's shoe size, weight, speed or even a bothersome injury like a twisted ankle.

Any character may take precautions against being tracked by covering his trail. This requires a Wits + Survival roll (difficulty 6). Each success scored raises the difficulty on any Tracking rolls against the character by one, to a maximum of 10. Botching on this attempt lowers the difficulty by two; in your care to erase subtle signs of your passage, you left obvious ones, like dropping a personal item.

SOCIAL FEATS

These systems govern tasks involving the three Social Attributes (Charisma, Manipulation and Appearance). Scenes revolving around character interaction are gen-

erally more interesting when roleplayed out, so these systems should be used only when absolutely necessary or when the Storyteller wishes to gloss over a particular scene for some reason.

- Carousing [Charisma + Empathy]: Sometimes it pays to be the life of the party, even when you're dead. It's possible the character simply wants everyone to like him, regardless of how he feels in return, or he may need to surround himself with "friends" when in trouble. Finally, social situations tend to loosen even the tightest lips, and information can flow fast and free in such environments. In all these cases, a character who can bring the spotlight on himself — and keep it there — has several advantages. If a character tries winning someone over by simply being fun and entertaining, roll Charisma + Empathy, difficulty 6. The Storyteller may modify this difficulty based on the target's first impression of the character. A black man has a tough time making friends at a KKK barbecue! The target's nature (Bon Vivant or Curmudgeon, for example) may also influence the difficulty. On a botched roll, the character manages to piss off not only the target but just about everyone in earshot.
- Credibility [Manipulation/Perception + Subterfuge]: The Subterfuge talent is a two-sided coin, and covers both lies and the ability to penetrate them. When a character tries pulling the wool over someone's eves, he rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge. This includes impersonating another person, passing off forged documents as the real thing and even telling little white lies. Victims of such attempts should roll Perception + Subterfuge. Both parties roll against difficulty 7, and whoever achieves more successes wins. On a tie, the lie remains undetected, though telltale signs like smudged ink on a phony passport or a contradictory lie may arouse suspicion. Supporting evidence, including particularly convincing documents or a friend who backs up your alibi may increase the difficulty to detect a scam. On the flip side, you can fool only some of the people some of the time; characters detecting a scam may benefit from the Teamwork rules.

The Storyteller may call for hacking or intrusion rolls during the preparation of a con, depending on the nature of the scam. Similarly, Investigation rolls may aid in deconstructing a lie. If the dishonest character's player botches, the plan falls to pieces, probably in a fairly public fashion.

• Fast-Talk [Manipulation + Subterfuge]: When you have to lie, do it quickly. By the time your victim sorts the truth from your cock and bull, you can be long gone. Maybe the target believes the lies, is baffled by technical jargon or is simply frustrated enough not to care where you go, so long as it's away. The fast-talking character's player rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge in a resisted action, while the target's player rolls Wits

- + Subterfuge. Both roll against a difficulty of 6. As always, the greater number of successes wins, though on a tie the victim believes you're only worth listening to for another few seconds. On a botch, the character fast-talks his way right into trouble, perhaps insulting the target or simply saying something the target knows is false.
- Interrogation [Manipulation + Empathy/Intimidation]: Asking questions is easy. Getting answers is tougher. Discovering the truth can be nigh impossible, unless you know how to work the target. When a character interrogates someone by asking the right questions the right way, roll Manipulation + Empathy as a resisted action, opposed by the target's Willpower (both difficulty 6). Success means the character gains the trust, or at least cooperation, of the target, who answers his questions (perhaps without realizing it). The Storyteller may require multiple rolls through the interrogation's course; for most casual question and answer sessions, however, this isn't likely.

Of course, not all interviewees are friendly to the character. Alternative methods of Interrogation include manipulation (good cop/bad cop), physical torture (bamboo splinters under fingernails) or psychological torture ("sweat" sessions). Regardless of the specific method used, the interrogator's player rolls Manipulation + Intimidation, while the subject's player rolls either Willpower or Stamina + three dice (whichever is lower). Both players roll against difficulty 6. Storytellers may treat this as a combination of resisted and extended actions, depending on the time spent on the interrogation.

During physical torture, the victim suffers one health level (bashing or lethal, at the interrogator player's discretion) for every roll made for the torturer during the interrogation, regardless of whether he extracts information. Similarly, mental and psychological torture cost the victim one point of Willpower per roll. If the victim's player botches a roll to resist the torture, he may be crippled, mentally shattered or even killed.

For each success the interrogator's player scores in excess of the victim's total, she drags out another tidbit of information. If this total exceeds the victim's permanent Willpower, the target's will breaks completely, and all the information he possesses spills out in a flood. Bear in mind, however, that the victim may simply not have the desired information. The Storyteller should determine the relevance of the facts provided. Further, victims who break often continue lying. Rather than face further torture, a subject often says whatever he thinks his tormentor wants to hear.

Teamwork rules apply to interrogators normally. Storytellers should note that participating characters need not use the same Skill. For example, one character

may attempt to weasel into the subject's confidence while the other plays hardball. The aforementioned "good cop/bad cop" approach is an excellent example of this.

• Intimidation [Strength/Manipulation + Intimidation]: The fine art of intimidation doesn't always require overt threats. A particularly imposing physique, dead gaze or terse speech patterns can all gain the character a wide berth. This is passive intimidation. People stay out of the character's way, avoid talking to him and cooperate with his requests. The higher the character's Intimidation trait, the more others avoid raising his ire. No roll is required.

Should a character attempt to actively frighten someone into behaving a certain way or performing a certain task, either with a glare, a threatening gesture or a grating whisper, roll Manipulation + Intimidation as a resisted action, opposed by the target's Willpower. Both participants roll against difficulty 6. The target must achieve more successes than the initiator or bend to his opponent's will. If the threatening character's player botches, he may embarrass himself in some way or make a threat he clearly cannot complete. No one blinks twice in his direction.

Alternatively, a character can forgo the fine art of psychological intimidation and muscle the target into cooperating. Roll for a physical attack according to the combat rules, then roll for the Intimidation. The latter is handled exactly as above, except the acting character's player rolls Strength + Intimidation rather than Manipulation + Intimidation.

• Oration [Charisma + Leadership]: Whether it's an attempt to inspire a group of blips to action outside their routine or bolster the morale of an Orpheus crucible, oration requires a Charisma + Leadership roll, generally against difficulty 6. The Storyteller may increase or decrease the difficulty based on the audience's disposition, depending on how receptive they are to the orator's overtures. If the roll fails, the crowd rejects the character's entreaties and will likely behave contrary to the character's wishes. On a botch, the audience is angered or offended by the speaker and may even assault him.

If a character has time to prepare a speech in advance, her player may roll Intelligence + Expression (difficulty 7). Each success lowers the oration's difficulty by one. Failure changes nothing, while a botch means the prepared material is completely inappropriate, perhaps even offensive. The difficulty on the oration roll increases by two in this case.

• Performance [Charisma + Performance]: As an old standby in hauntings, spooks often try to generate ghostly melodies from forgotten musical instruments or simply sing a creepy tune in a cracked whisper. On the more mundane level, Orpheus agents on beach might be frequent performers on the local club circuit or din-

ner theater actors. When a character performs before a live (or the restless dead) audience, he rolls Charisma + Performance (difficulty 7). As with oration, the audience's predisposition toward your character (or his repertoire) may increase or decrease this difficulty, as can the complexity of the performance. One success indicates an uninspired but acceptable show, while additional successes make the event truly memorable. Depending on the performance in question, the audience may sit in rapt attention or joyously clap their hands to the music. Failure indicates minor mistakes in the performance or a simple failure to garner the audience's attention, while a botch means the performer hit several sour notes, flubbed lines, broke a string or suffered some other calamity.

COMBAT SYSTEMS

Just because a spook is intangible, doesn't mean he's invulnerable. Skimmers, while projecting, suffer psychosomatic damage to their bodies when their gauze is struck by a fist, board or bullet. Sleepers are relatively "safer" from the ravages of combat since damage incurred to their ghostly forms does not affect their bodies. Even so, discorporation is one hell of an inconvenience, especially when your crucible is relying on you.

Projectors sometimes face danger while in their own bodies, as well, whether while acting on Orpheus' behalf or simply fighting with someone while on beach. Part-time spooks rarely want danger as a full-time job, but so it goes.

Many Orpheus assignments rely heavily on stealth and cunning, rather than force of arms. Regardless, Orpheus sometimes contracts out operatives on black operations, and sometimes even the most routine assignment can degenerate into a firefight if a security guard senses something amiss. Tread lightly.

That said, combat shouldn't rule your game. Orpheus Group is trying to present a positive PR spin on its actions, and open combat is against company policy (especially when culprits are caught on camera or seen by witnesses). Headlines are *not* on the agenda unless they shed some positive light, and open combat should be a last resort. Even assassinations should be quick and clean. An operative who strides into a four-star restaurant toting an automatic weapon won't last long in this job.

The section following details combat in **Orpheus.** While not intended as a strict tactical simulation, it reflects the fluid, brutal nature of real-world combat while still allowing enough flexibility for drama and creativity.

While Storytellers should freely ignore or change any of these systems (particularly those that bog down combat in your game), it's usually wise to inform players before implementing such changes. Combat situations are potentially lethal, and someone whose character dies when the player is blind-sided by a last-minute rule adjustment won't be happy.

The Storyteller should strive to maintain realism through narration and forgo dice rolls whenever possible (pay special attention to the rules for Automatic Success on p. 210). It is particularly important, however, that the Storyteller treat the characters fairly in combat. This doesn't mean slavish adherence to the dice, but rather a willingness to place common sense over the results of a fluke dice roll. If a character is reasonably cautious and smart but dies through a series of fluke dice rolls, cut him some slack. Of course, characters who charge blindly into combat and make stupid mistakes are on their own. Don't simply kill them for their troubles, but don't pull any punches, either.

TYPES OF COMBAT

Combat ultimately falls into two categories: Close combat and ranged combat. Both use the same basic rules, with only minor adjustments.

SETTING THE SCENE

One of the most important elements of the Storyteller's job is describing the scene with sufficient detail and veracity for the players to interact with it. The Storyteller is director, set dresser, costume artist and prop master. Each of these roles is especially important in a combat scene since it is vital the Storyteller apprise each player of the dangers facing his character and his options in the coming battle.

The Storyteller should detail the changing environment after each action by describing the effects of rolls. It's important to strike a balance in narration; while revealing too little about the scene hobbles the crucible, the Storyteller should also carefully reveal only what each character could know about the situation.

Obviously, the Storyteller can't describe the scene in exhaustive detail or the narration dulls the excitement of combat. It doesn't matter how much flair you put into your descriptions, if combatants stand around admiring the scenery, matters grow boring. With that in mind, you leave out details. Is the lid on or off that garbage can? Are there cue sticks lying across that pool table, or are they on the rack against the wall? Let your players fill in these details for you. When a character scoops up an ashtray off the bar and brains her opponent — an ashtray you haven't explicitly stated was there — let her (unless it contradicts an earlier statement, like a "no smoking" sign on the door).

Combat should be fast, fluid and exciting, so don't fret the details.

- Close Combat: Close combat, barring sports like judo and boxing, is dirty, ugly, brutal and mean. This covers both unarmed combat (Dexterity + Brawl) and Melee (Dexterity + Melee). It pertains to any situation wherein two or more combatants square off within a yard or two, and proceed to beat (or stab or slash) each other, either with weapons or without.
- Ranged Combat: Ranged combat covers any situation wherein one character tries striking another at a distance, usually with a firearm (Dexterity + Firearms), though any weapon firing a projectile uses this roll. This includes hurled weapons (Dexterity + Athletics). Range varies depending on the weapon used, though the target must be in sight.

COMBAT TURNS

Combat can be extremely confusing. While this might be desirable for the characters, and quite true to real life, the players shouldn't be similarly handicapped. Keeping each character's actions in order, and any results thereof, can be challenging for any Storyteller, so we've broken combat down into three stages: Initiative, Attack and Resolution. These three stages together constitute one three-second combat turn.

STAGE ONE: INITIATIVE

Someone has to throw the first punch, and this is when we determine who. While some Storytellers go clockwise around the table to determine order, this system usually allows characters with high Dexterity and Wits to act first in a turn, while still allowing for a few (possibly unpleasant) surprises in turn order. At the beginning of each turn, each player rolls one die and adds the result to his initiative rating [Dexterity + Wits]. The Storyteller should roll for any characters he controls. The player with the highest result has her character act first, followed by the rest in descending order of results. If two characters tie, the one with the higher initiative rating goes first. If they have the same rating, they act simultaneously. Each character's wound penalties (p. 200, 233) subtract directly from his initiative rating.

Once everyone involved determines initiative order, each player declares his character's action for the turn in reverse initiative order. This way, faster characters can react to those slower, and determine their actions based on what they hear. During this step, players should announce any multiple actions, activation of Horrors, teamwork, use of Willpower or Spite points, or even a delay of action to see how the turn plays out. The Storyteller may ask for clarification of your action, so be prepared to flesh it out.

Three situations may change the initiative order. If you delay your character's action, you may act at any point *after* your turn in the initiative count. This is

yielding, and it allows your character to pause and wait to see what happens once others act before him. When yielding, you may even interrupt another, slower character's action. If two players both yield and eventually decide to act at the same time (possibly by reacting to the same event), the character with the higher initiative total acts first.

Defensive actions are another spanner in the works of the normal initiative order (see Aborting Actions and Defensive Maneuvers, p. 230). Your character may defend himself at any time, provided you have an action remaining. This also requires either a Willpower roll or the expenditure of a temporary Willpower point. A defensive action is simultaneous with the action it defends against. The character trades his normal action for the chance to protect against the attack. The character is allowed to defend *only* himself (block, dodge, parry), though the Storyteller may judge that a successful defense damages the attacker, as when if a character parries a punch with a sword.

Multiple actions, the third exception to initiative order, occur after everyone else acts, regardless of the character's place in the initiative queue. When several characters take multiple actions, they act in order of initiative, but after any characters not pursuing multiple actions. Multiple defensive actions constitute the only exception to this rule: Multiple defensive actions take place at the same time as the attack, as discussed above, possibly even at different times in the turn.

STAGE TWO: ATTACH

Once the group determines the initiative order and each player declares his character's action, the turn begins in earnest with the attack stage. During this phase, players roll for success one at a time, in order of initiative. The Storyteller oversees this process, determines roll difficulties and which Attributes and Abilities apply, and approves the use of Willpower. As with any other Ability roll, a character may attempt the action without the appropriate Talent (Brawl or Athletics) or Skill (Firearms or Melee). Just as at any other time, if a character lacks the appropriate Talent, he may attempt the action anyway by applying only the appropriate Attribute; in the case of Skills, like Firearms and Melee, the difficulty of the roll increases by one.

As discussed previously, most combat actions fall into one of two categories: Close or ranged. In close combat, roll Dexterity + Brawl if unarmed or Dexterity + Melee if armed. Ranged combat functions in similar fashion: Roll either Dexterity + Firearms (guns and other projectile weapons) or Dexterity + Athletics (thrown weapons). Weapons may modify the attack's difficulty, depending on factors including weapon quality, accessories or rate of fire.



The default difficulty of most attacks is 6. This can change thanks to environmental modifiers including darkness, cramped quarters or a helpless target. If the roll fails, the attacker misses and does no damage. On a botch, it's entirely possible the attacker injures himself or an ally, or he damages or destroys his weapon. The Storyteller should consider the situation while deciding on such issues; a character throwing a punch, for example, probably won't hit himself regardless of how poor his roll but he might hit a pillar instead of his target.

STAGE THREE: RESOLUTION

Once an attack hits, it's time to determine how much punishment it inflicts. The type (bashing or lethal) and amount of damage depends on the type of attack. Each attack maneuver specifies the number of damage dice rolled.

Different weapons have different default damage dice pools, which the situation may modify further. Additional successes beyond the first inflict extra dice of damage at a rate of one die per additional success (the attacker landed a particularly telling blow). When a character is struck, the Storyteller may sometimes allow a soak roll (with a dice pool equal to the target's Stamina) to see if he's tough enough to endure the damage without sustaining serious injury. The rest of this chapter offers

more information on determining damage, as well as the long-term effects thereof.

Once a combat inflicts damage, the Storyteller describes the action in narrative form, bringing the attack to life. Rather than simply declaring the health levels inflicted and moving on, the Storyteller adds depth and color to the situation. He might say, "Your gun barks once and the slug plows into the thug's shoulder. A spray of meat, blood and bone shards erupts from the exit wound. The thug paws dumbly at his now useless left arm, but only for a moment. He shudders once, as if gripped by a sudden chill, then collapses to the pavement." It's always the Storyteller's job to evoke the setting, but it's particularly important during the furor of combat. Otherwise, you're just rolling dice.

DAMAGE TYPES

Different attacks have different damage ratings, which dictate the number of damage dice rolled on a successful attack of that type, thereby determining a given attack's effectiveness. This is the damage dice pool. In close combat, the attacker's Strength heavily influences the damage dice pool, while in ranged combat, the weapon in question typically determines damage.

Damage rolls are made against a base difficulty 6. For each success, the victim suffers one health level of damage (or, in the case of most spooks, loses one point

COMBAT SUMMARY CHART

Stage One: Initiative

• Everyone rolls initiative, with the Storyteller rolling for any supporting characters on the scene. Declare actions in ascending order of initiative, including multiple actions, activation of Horrors and expenditure of Willpower. The character with the highest initiative usually attempts his action first, though his player may yield his turn until after his place in the original initiative queue (but still allowing him to pre-empt other characters). A character may defend against an attack in exchange for his normal action, though his player must make a Willpower roll or surrender a point of Willpower to do so. Such defensive actions take place simultaneously with the attack, regardless of the defending character's Initiative roll.

Stage Two: Attack

- Unarmed close combat: roll Dexterity + Brawl.
- Armed close combat: roll Dexterity + Melee.
- Ranged combat (guns): roll Dexterity + Firearms.
- Ranged combat (thrown or missile weapons): roll Dexterity + Athletics.

Stage Three: Resolution

- Determine the damage inflicted for each successful attack, based on weapon type or maneuver, adding any extra damage dice gained from additional successes on the attack roll.
- Characters struck may roll Stamina to soak damage, if allowed.
- The Storyteller describes the results of the attack.

of Vitality for each level of bashing damage and two points for each of lethal). This damage may be reduced by a soak roll (see Soak, below).

Orpheus features two types of damage: bashing and lethal. Both assume the combatants are capable of hurting each other. A ghost/projected entity who hasn't manifested fully cannot hurt a human unless he uses the proper Horror (like Helter-Skelter or Puppetry). Likewise, all mundane physical attacks against an incorporeal spook are virtually useless.

• Bashing: The attacker punches, wrestles or otherwise bludgeons his victim, inflicting blunt-force trauma. This type of damage probably won't kill a character, unless the victim is subjected to repeated or prolonged

beatings. The victim uses Stamina to resist bashing effects, as discussed below; it also heals more quickly than lethal damage (see p. 228). Bashing damage against ghosts and sleepers removes a point of Vitality per successful damage die.

• Lethal: Blades and bullets are far more dangerous than a punch to the jaw, and may very well kill a character in a single attack. Human characters cannot resist lethal damage, and this includes projectors in their bodies; these injuries take much longer to heal by normal means. Ghosts and projecting sleepers may use Stamina to soak lethal damage, while projecting skimmers automatically convert lethal to bashing (for the same difficulty of 5). Lethal damage against most gauze, however, incurs a loss of two Vitality points for each successful die of damage to reflect the attack's severity.

The minimum number of dice in a damage dice pool, whether bashing or lethal, is one. No modifier can eliminate a damage dice pool completely. Even the weakest attack may inflict punishment, no matter how superficial. Further, a player or Storyteller cannot botch a damage roll. A botch indicates that no damage is scored, but no additional mishaps occur. See p. 210 for rules on applying damage effects.

SOAH

Your character's Stamina aids in resisting damage when applicable. This is called "soaking" damage. A character's soak dice pool is equal to his Stamina rating. Unless a character benefits from some special protection — like armor — humans and in-body projectors can not soak lethal damage. Ghosts and projected sleepers may soak lethal damage, however, while skimmers simply convert the damage to bashing (but against their health levels).

During resolution, a player may roll his soak dice pool to resist damage inflicted by attacks during the turn. This is a reflexive action, and therefore happens automatically; the character need not reserve an action for his soak roll. The player makes only one soak roll against the total damage of an attack (or attacks) inflicted on the character in a turn. The character may soak the damage from multiple attacks when it is appropriate to do so. Soak rolls are difficulty 6, except for *projecting* skimmers (with difficulty 5) or unless otherwise ruled by the Storyteller. Each success rolled reduces the damage inflicted on the character by one die. Just as with damage rolls, players cannot botch soak rolls.

ARMOR

Aptly described as the right outfit for the wrong occasion, armor provides a last line of defense for a character struck by a fist, blade or bullet. Armor includes anything from a Kevlar vest to a hot plate slipped underneath a poncho. Armor adds a number of soak

dice to a character's pool equal to its rating, and it may protect against both bashing and lethal damage. Against lethal damage, a human's soak dice pool consists only of the bonus dice granted by armor; it does not include his Stamina rating.

Attackers may make called shots against unprotected body locations and thus ignore armor. The Storyteller should consider the specific armor when assigning the difficulty modifier. Targeting a weak point in a soldier's Kevlar battle garb might increase the difficulty by three, while striking a location unprotected by an undercover officer's Kevlar vest might incur a penalty of only one.

Even the sturdiest man-made armor can be destroyed (this excludes armor derived from Stains and Horrors). When an attack inflicts damage equal to or greater than the armor's rating, it destroys the item.

While protective gear is a godsend against attacks, its bulk weighs down the wearer. While in armor, a character must subtract dice equal to the armor's penalty rating from all Dexterity-based dice pools (this is not applicable to armors derived from Stains and Horrors). See the armor chart on p. 234 for the details.

COMBAT MANEUVERS

In combat, characters may perform the following maneuvers. When in combat, the players should narrate their characters' actions, rather than simply proclaiming (for the seventh time), "I punch him." This makes the scene more interesting and lessens the onus on the Storyteller to flesh out the visuals, allowing him to keep better track of the action. Unless otherwise stated, these maneuvers require one action to perform.

GENERAL MANEUVERS

• Abort an Action: A character may abort his stated action to defend himself against an attack at any time during the turn, allowing him to attempt a block, dodge or parry action. This requires either a successful Willpower roll (a difficulty 6 reflexive action) or the expenditure of a Willpower point. If the Willpower roll fails, the character is unable to defend himself even by spending a point of Willpower.

The defense action occurs simultaneously with the attack triggering it, regardless of the defending character's place in the initiative order. If a character has already acted in a turn, he may not perform this maneuver.

• Ambush: To sneak up behind another character or conceal your presence for a surprise attack requires a Dexterity + Stealth roll resisted by the target's Perception + Alertness. If the ambusher's player rolls more successes than his victim, he may add the net number

of successes by which he exceeded the victim's roll to his attack roll. Further, the target may not defend against the attack with a block, dodge or parry action. On a tie, the ambusher still attacks first, but the target may defend against the attack normally; the attacking player adds no extra dice to her dice pool. If the victim scores more successes, both parties roll initiative normally. This maneuver may not be performed on a character already engaged in combat or otherwise aware of your presence.

The same rules apply when using manifest to sneak up on someone. Manifest requires one action to complete, which may allow the victim to detect the sudden presence of someone there.

- Blind Fighting: Characters denied sight during combat are at a significant disadvantage. Attacking while blind or in total darkness increases the attack's difficulty modifier by two. These conditions completely negate the possibility of launching a ranged attack. This is because close combat attacks generally sweep a larger, more immediate area, while ranged attacks operate along tighter, more linear corridors.
- Flank and Rear Attacks: Attacking from one side of a target adds a single die to the attacking player's dice pool. Similarly, attacking from behind adds two dice.
- Movement: Any character may move half his running distance (see p. 217) and still take an action in the same turn, either during or after the movement. Although not technically a multiple action, the Storyteller may nonetheless assign dice pool penalties or difficulty modifiers if the maneuver is particularly difficult (jumping over hurdles while firing a gun, for example). Further, if the character acts *while* moving (rather than after), each yard moved during the turn inflicts a one die penalty on the affected player's dice pool.
- Targeting: Aiming for a specific location on the target increases the difficulty of an attack roll. Characters may attempt targeting to bypass armor or cover, strike an object from a target's hand or inflict more critical damage.

The Storyteller may deem lethal bashing damage that targets the victim's head, particularly if the target is caught unawares (during an ambush maneuver, for example). Refer to the following chart when determining difficulty and damage dice pool modifiers for targeted attacks.

Target Size	Difficulty	Damage
Medium (leg, arm, briefcase))+1	No modifier
Small (hand, head, weapon)	+2	+1
Tiny (eye, heart, padlock)	+3	+2

DEFENSIVE MANEUVERS

When attacked, a character may defend rather than continue in his declared action for the turn. So long as he has not yet used his action for the turn, he may attempt to block, dodge or parry an incoming attack. To attempt such a maneuver, the player must make a successful Willpower roll (difficulty 6) or surrender a point of Willpower (see Aborting Actions, p. 229). If the Willpower roll fails, the character commits to his original action and may not defend, even by spending a point of Willpower.

Characters can counter most attacks using one or more of the three defensive maneuvers, though certain situations may restrict their use. Dodging is difficult when one is handcuffed to a chain-link fence, though blocking or parrying is possible if one hand is free. Similarly, characters can't block or parry a bullet. The Storyteller decides whether or not a particular defensive maneuver is applicable in each situation.

All defensive maneuvers use the same system, though each utilizes a different Ability, as detailed below. Each is a resisted action: The Storyteller compares the defense roll to the attack roll for his assailant. If the attacker rolls equal or fewer successes, he misses. Otherwise, subtract the defender's successes from the attackers; the difference is the attacker's final success total, with any successes beyond the first added to the damage dice pool as usual. Thus, though the defender doesn't halt the attack, he reduces the damage inflicted.

- Block [Dexterity + Brawl]: The character uses his own body to block a hand-to-hand bashing attack. Usually, characters cannot block lethal attacks, though if the defender is wearing armor, it's possible at the Storyteller's discretion. Characters cannot block ranged attacks... Orpheus isn't that kind of game.
- Dodge [Dexterity + Athletics (or variable Attribute + Ability combinations)]: Provided a character has room to maneuver (subject to the Storyteller's approval), he may attempt dodging any type of attack. In close combat, the character ducks a blow, sidesteps or simply moves out of range at the moment of the attack. During a ranged attack, a successful defender must move at least one yard and either find cover or fall flat.
- Parry [Dexterity + Melee]: The character uses a melee weapon to turn aside a close-combat attack. When parrying a bashing attack with a weapon that does lethal damage, the defender may inflict damage on his assailant. If the defender rolls more successes on the resisted action, add the weapon's base damage to the number of extra successes scored on the defense roll. This total is the damage dice pool, which is then rolled against the attacker as if you had attacked him successfully, instead.

DEFENSE COMPLICATIONS

Although it is for simplicity's sake that each combat turn consists of several discrete actions, it's important to remember that all actions performed in one turn take place over the course of a few frantic seconds, making them nearly simultaneous. As such, a character may declare his intent to take multiple actions and assign one of them to defensive actions, or simply defend for the entire turn. This is different from aborting an action in favor of a defensive action. Although the character must still abort his action to defend against attacks that occur earlier in initiative order, he may defend against later attacks without resorting to such measures.

During a multiple action involving both a defensive action and non-defensive action, the character acts in turn as normal. Following his action, he may defend against any attacks directed against him for the duration of the turn. The multiple-action system applies normally, so each subsequent defensive action becomes incrementally more difficult (see Multiple Actions, p. 211). Note that naming multiple attackers to defend against further complicates the issue, adding to the difficulty numbers of each defense roll (see Multiple Opponents, p. 231).

Rather than attack and defend in the same turn, a character may focus his full attention on avoiding incoming strikes. Just as above, you must abort your action to defend against attacks occurring prior to your initiative, but may defend against any attacks happening simultaneously with or after your action. If a character does nothing but defend in a turn, do not use the multiple-action system. Instead, the character rolls his full dice pool for the first defensive action, which is then reduced by one die for each subsequent defense in the same turn. When your dice pool falls to zero, you may not defend against further attacks.

CLOSE-COMBAT MANEUVERS

This is a list of the most common close-combat maneuvers, and it is by no means comprehensive. Players can invent new maneuvers on the fly, though the Storyteller determines the Traits used and the accuracy, difficulty and damage of the attack. Weapon type determines damage dice pool for melee attacks (see the Melee Weapons chart, p. 234), which is usually lethal (though blunt weapons like baseball bats and clubs inflict bashing damage).

The Storyteller may elect to modify the characteristics of any maneuver listed here, based on the situation.

• Bite: Not surprisingly, many are reluctant to resort to this desperate tactic, but when fighting for your existence, anything goes. Though biting the meaty part of a target's arm probably won't cause much damage,

MANEUVER CHARACTERISTICS

Participants roll combat maneuvers against difficulty 6. Some effects and situations may modify attack rolls, difficulty numbers or damage dice pools. The following categories explain the maneuver characteristics used herein.

- Traits: The Attribute + Ability used for the maneuver. In certain circumstances, the Storyteller may allow (or force) you to substitute another Attribute or Ability, or both. If your character doesn't have the appropriate Ability, default to the Attribute alone (modifying the difficulty as normal if the Ability in question is a skill).
- Accuracy: Several maneuvers add dice to the attack dice pool. For example, a "+3" here adds three dice to the attack's dice pool for that attack.
- Difficulty: Some maneuvers apply positive or negative modifiers to the attack's difficulty. Base difficulty is always 6, which is adjusted as indicated in the difficulty characteristic. A "+2," for example, increases a standard attacks difficulty (6) to 8.
- Damage: This is the maneuver's damage dice pool.

tearing a chunk out of his ear will hurt like hell. The Storyteller may require the attacker to grapple the victim before attempting a bite. Generally, a bite's difficulty is 6, though targeting specific body parts (eyes, ears, fingers, etc.) may increase that difficulty by one or two. Biting damage may be either bashing or lethal, depending on the targeted location.

Traits: Dexterity + Brawl Difficulty: Normal Accuracy: Normal Damage: Strength

• Clinch: The character wraps his target in a tight hold. On a successful clinch, the attack deals no damage, though the victim is grappled. In subsequent turns, both characters involved act in normal order, as determined by the initiative roll. The attacker may inflict his Strength in damage dice automatically without an attack roll; alternatively, he may simply hold his target and inflict no damage. The victim's player can attempt to escape by rolling Strength + Brawl, opposed by the attacker. The victim must score more successes than the attacker to escape. Neither character may perform any other action while in a clinch.

Traits: Strength + Brawl Difficulty: Normal Accuracy: Normal Damage: Strength

• **Disarm:** The character entangles his opponent's weapon or simply strikes it with a mighty blow, attempt-

ing to disarm his foe. The acting player makes an attack roll with a one added to difficulty (or two if attempting to disarm with Dexterity + Brawl). If successful, he rolls damage dice as usual, but deals no damage to the target. Instead, if the number of successes on the damage roll exceeds the victim's Strength, the attack knocks the weapon from the opponent's grasp. If the disarming character's player botches, he may lose his own weapon or leave himself open to attack and be struck himself.

Traits: Dexterity + Brawl/Melee Difficulty: +1
Accuracy: Normal Damage: Special

• **Kick:** A foot stomp or simple kick to an opponent's shin increases the difficulty modifier by one and inflicts Strength + 1 damage dice. More spectacular maneuvers, like a spinning hook kick to the target's head, increase these numbers at a proportional rate.

Traits: Dexterity + Brawl Difficulty: +1
Accuracy: Normal Damage: Strength +1

- Multiple Opponents: When fighting multiple opponents, the difficulty for attack and defense rolls against each target after the first increases by one, to a maximum modifier of four.
- Scratch: While fingernails aren't as effective as claws, they serve in a pinch. If the character targets a specific body part the eyes, for example the victim may suffer secondary effects (like temporary blindness). Called shots usually increase the difficulty by one or two. Scratching is considered bashing damage.

Traits: Dexterity + Brawl Accuracy: Normal Damage: Strength

• Strike: Simplify, simplify, simplify. The character simply punches his opponent, causing bashing damage. This simple action inflicts the attacker's Strength in damage dice. Strikes targeted at specific body parts may increase both the difficulty and damage dice of this maneuver.

Traits: Dexterity + Brawl
Accuracy: Normal
Damage: Strength

• Sweep: The character attempts to knock his opponent off his feet, usually by tripping the victim with either his own leg, or with a weapon like a staff or chain. If the sweep is successful, the target suffers the attacker's Strength in bashing damage dice and must make a Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 8) to avoid knockdown (see Maneuver Complications, p. 233).

Traits: Dexterity + Brawl/ Melee Difficulty: +1
Accuracy: Normal Damage: Strength; knockdown

• Tackle: The character rushes his opponent, trying to knock him off balance and drive him to the ground. The difficulty and damage dice pool for this maneuver are both modified by one. The combatants players must

then make Dexterity + Athletics rolls (difficulty 7) or suffer knockdown (see Maneuver Complications, p. 233). Even if the victim succeeds, he is unbalanced and suffers a difficulty modifier of one to his actions during the following turn.

Traits: Strength + Brawl Accuracy: Normal

Difficulty: +1
Damage: Strength+1;
knockdown

• Weapon Length: When attacking a target wielding a longer weapon than the character (like a sword or staff against the attacker's knife or fists, say), the difficulty of the attack roll increases by one, with the target using his weapon to keep the attacker at bay.

Traits: Dexterity + Brawl
Accuracy: Normal

Difficulty: +1
Damage: Perweapontype

• Weapon Strike: The character uses a weapon to slash, thrust or jab in melee. See the Melee Weapons Chart (p. 234) for details.

Traits: Dexterity + Melee Accuracy: Normal

Difficulty: Normal

Damage: Perweapontype

RANGED COMBAT MANEUVERS

Ranged combat is a different animal than close combat, bringing an entirely new set of tactical options and maneuvers into play. The systems detailed below offer ways to incorporate these choices into each skirmish. As with the close combat maneuvers, players can create their own, to which the Storyteller should assign characteristics.

- Aiming: Each turn a character spends aiming at his target adds a die to his player's attack pool, to a maximum number of bonus dice that are equal to the aiming character's Perception. This maneuver requires at least one dot in Firearms to perform. If the weapon has a scope, add two more dice for the first turn of aiming; the maximum bonus dice also increases by two. An aiming character must focus on his target and may perform no other actions. Taking an action before shooting even to defend spoils the character's aim and negates any benefits. Further, the character may move no faster than walking speed while aiming.
- Automatic Fire: The character unloads his entire clip, hosing his target with lead. This maneuver requires only one roll, but the weapon's accuracy increases by 10. On the other hand, the attack's difficulty increases by two due to recoil. Extra successes beyond the to hit requirements add to the damage dice pool as usual, though the weapon's damage rating remains unchanged. A character may only attempt this maneuver if the weapon's clip is at least half full; the attack may not target a particular body part or object. Only certain weapons are capable of automatic fire, as detailed in the Ranged Weapons Chart (p. 234). Note

that this action can reduce Blind Conditions penalties at Storyteller discretion.

Traits: Dexterity + Firearms **Accuracy:** +10

Difficulty: +2
Damage: Special

• Cover: A character may duck behind a wall, overturn furniture or use another character as a shield. Each of these maneuvers provides the character with cover. Cover increases the difficulty to hit a character, but it can also impede his own actions. The chart below indicates the difficulty modifier to hit a character behind various grades of cover.

At the same time, the character's difficulty to return fire increases: His line of sight may be obstructed, or he may have to pop out of cover, fire, then duck into cover once more. If a character fires from shelter, the difficulty modifier to the attack roll is one less than indicated on the chart. Thus, if the character is behind superior cover (+3), he suffers a difficulty modifier of only two to his own attacks.

Cover modifiers are cumulative, so if two combatants exchange fire while both are so protected, both modifiers apply. For example, a character hiding in superior cover attacks while his target is in light cover. His player suffers two to the difficulty modifier for his own shelter, and an additional one for his opponent's light cover.

• Multiple Shots: The character may fire multiple shots in the same action. This is a multiple action: The

Cover Type	Difficulty Modifier
Light (lying flat, behind streetlight)) +1
Good (behind a car)	+2
Superior (around a corner)	+3

first shot's dice pool decreases by the total number of shots fired, and each subsequent shot drops by one die, cumulatively. The weapon's rate of fire ultimately limits the number of shots that can be fired in a turn.

Traits: Dexterity + Firearms
Accuracy: Special
Weapon type

Difficulty: Normal
Damage: Per

- Range: Each weapon on the Ranged Weapons Chart (p. 234) has a range entry. All attacks within this distance are difficulty 6. Characters may attack up to double the listed range, but the difficulty rises to 8. A target within two meters is in point blank range of the attacker, whose player need only beat a difficulty 4 to hit.
- Reloading: Reloading requires a full turn. A reload action may be part of a multiple action at the Storyteller's discretion.
- **Strafe:** Rather than attempt to hit a specific target, the strafing character hoses an area in hopes of hitting

multiple victims. This maneuver adds 10 dice to the attack dice pool and empties the weapon's clip.

Make one attack roll. If successful, divide the successes evenly among all targets in the designated area (which may be no more than three yards wide). Each success beyond the first applied to a target adds to the damage dice pool against that target, as usual. If only one target is within the area strafed, no more than half the successes are applicable against him. If you roll fewer successes than there are potential targets, the Storyteller assigns the successes — randomly or not, at his option — until having accounted for all successes. Dodge rolls against a strafe attack suffer a one to difficulty modifier. Note that this action can reduce Blind Conditions penalties at Storyteller discretion.

Traits: Dexterity + Firearms
Accuracy: +10
Difficulty: +2
Damage: Special

• Three-Round Burst: The attacker fires three shots in rapid succession, each at the same target. This attack adds two dice to the attacking player's dice pool. As detailed on the Ranged Weapons Chart, only certain weapons may fire three-round bursts. Recoil increases the difficulty modifier to the attack roll by one. As with automatic fire, only one damage dice pool is rolled.

Traits: Dexterity + Firearms
Accuracy: +2
Difficulty: +1
Damage: Perweapontype

• Two Weapons: Any character may fire two weapons simultaneously. Although difficult, the potential for additional damage sometimes outweighs the added complication. Firing two weapons is a multiple action, and therefore imposes the usual reduced dice pools according to the total shots fired. Further, each attack roll for the character's off hand suffers a difficulty modifier of one, unless he's ambidextrous. The character may fire a total number of shots equal to the sum of the two weapons' rates of fire.

Traits: Dexterity + Firearms
Accuracy: Special

Difficulty: +1/off-hand Damage: Perweapontype

MANEUVER COMPLICATIONS

Combat is rarely a clean and orderly affair, and it can be complicated by any number of surprises. Several possibilities are listed below, and the Storyteller should feel free to invent more.

- Blinded: When attacking a blinded character, the acting character gains two additional dice for his attack dice pool. Conversely, blinded characters suffer two to the difficulty modifier on all actions.
- Dazed: If, on a single attack, the damage dealt exceeds the target's Stamina (or Stamina +2 for ghosts and projected entities), the victim is dazed. Dazed characters lose their action for this turn (if it hasn't already been spent) and the next, and they may

neither act nor defend during that time. Reflexive actions are unaffected.

- Immobilized: When attacking an immobilized victim who can still struggle (like a target being grappled by a third party), add two dice to the attack roll. If the target is completely unable to move (paralyzed or unconscious, for example), the attack automatically hits and inflicts additional damage equal to the attack's dice pool.
- Knockdown: The character falls or is knocked off his feet. A Dexterity + Athletics roll determines whether he can stand immediately or if his player's next action must be rising to his feet. In either case, in the following turn, his initiative drops by two. If the player botches the roll, his character falls hard or badly and perhaps twists his ankle or sprains his wrist. He suffers one health level or Vitality of bashing damage, which he may not soak by any means.

Some maneuvers, like Sweep or Tackle, could knock an opponent down. Further, particularly powerful attacks may cause the same result. The Storyteller determines when this is appropriate, though it should happen only when dramatically appropriate.

HEALTH

Although characters in **Orpheus** lurk at the edges of awareness for the living, they aren't invincible. Sleepers, while technically "dead," must carefully conserve and maintain their Vitality, for it binds their gauze together. To a sleeper, Vitality is flesh and bone, blood and adrenaline, all rolled into one.

Skimmers, however, are still quite mortal. Though a skimmer's gauze shares many characteristics with a sleeper's, skimmers differ in one important way: They can be hurt. They may be as insubstantial as sleepers, but skimmers' gauze has a sympathetic link with their bodies. When someone damages a skimmer's gauze, the body suffers the injury as bruising and blunt-force trauma. While this can ultimately be fatal, it grants the projecting skimmer two advantages: He may spend Vitality without fear of discorporation and all his injuries are bashing in nature. On the flip side, the body cannot continue without the soul. If a skimmer's gauze is "killed," so too is his body; if the body dies, the soul becomes a ghost.

In **Orpheus**, players keep track of their characters' general well being in two ways: Health levels and Vitality. While the latter applies to all characters, health levels no longer bother ghosts and projecting sleepers. They've passed beyond the pale, so mortal concerns like "blood loss" or "shock and trauma" are beyond them. Vitality is unique to ghosts and projectors; ordinary humans deal solely in health levels. This means when in the flesh, sleepers and skimmers suffer damage to their health levels only. When sleepers project or for ghosts, Vitality is key.

CLOSE-COMBAT MANEUVERS

Mancuvei	Traits	riccuracy	Difficulty	Damage
Bite	Dex + Brawl	Normal	Normal	Str
Block	Dex + Brawl	Special	Normal	(R)
Clinch	Str + Brawl	Normal	Normal	Str (C)
Disarm	Dex + Brawl/Melee	Normal	+1	Special
Dodge	Dex + Athletics	Special	Normal	(R)
Kick	Dex + Brawl	Normal	+1	Str +1
Parry	Dex + Melee	Special	Normal	(R)
Scratch	Dex + Brawl	Normal	Normal	Str
Strike	Dex + Brawl	Normal	Normal	Str
Sweep	Dex + Brawl/ Melee	Normal	+1	Str (K)
Tackle	Str + Brawl	Normal	+1	Str +1 (K)
Weapon Strike	Dex + Melee	Normal	Normal	Weapon

- (C): The maneuver carries over into successive turns.
- (K): The maneuver causes knockdown.
- (R): The maneuver reduces an opponent's attack successes.

RANGED COMBAT MANEUVERS TABLE

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Maneuver Traits	Accuracy	Difficulty	Damage	
Automatic Fire	Dex + Firearms	+10	+2	Weapon
Multiple Shots	Dex + Firearms	Special	Normal	Weapon
Strafing	Dex + Firearms	+10	+2	Weapon
Three-Round Burst	Dex + Firearms	+2	+1	Weapon
Two Weapons	Dex + Firearms	Special	+1/off-hand	Weapon

MELEE WEAPONS CHART

Weapon	Damage	Concea
Sap*	Str +1	P
Club*	Str + 2	T
Knife	Str +1	J
Sword	Str +2	T
Small Ax	Str +2	T
Large Ax	Str +3	N

Weapon: Characters may use many more items as weapons (butcher knife, golf club, pen, straight razor, bar stool). Apply the listing above that most closely fits the weapon used.

Concealment: P = Can be carried in pocket; J = Can be hidden in jacket; T = Can be hidden in trench coat; N = Can't be concealed.

*These objects are blunt, and do bashing damage unless targeted at the head (see Targeting, p. 229). In that case, they inflict lethal damage at the Storyteller's discretion.

ARMOR CHART

Class	Armor Rating	Penalty
Class One (reinforced clothing)	1	0
Class Two (armored T-shirt)	2	
Class Three (Kevlar vest)	3	1
Class Four (flak jacket)	4	2
Class Five (full riot gear)	5	3

RANGED	JEAP	ons c	HART	13	1:00	
Type Damage	Range	Rate	Clip	Conceal	Exemplar	一种种类型
Revolver, Lt.	4	12	3	6	P	SW M640 (.38 Special)
Revolver, Hvy.	6	35	2	6	J = -5	Colt Anaconda (.44 Magnum)
Pistol, Lt.	4	20	4	17+1	P	Glock 17 (9mm)
Pistol, Hvy.	5	30	3	7+1	J	Sig P220 (.45 ACP)
Rifle	8	200	1	5+1	N	Remington M-700 (30.06)
SMG, Small*	4	25	3	30+1	J	Ingram Mac-10 (9mm)
SMG, Large*	4	50	3	32+1	T	HK MP-5 (9mm)
Assault Rifle*	7	150	3	42+1	N	Steyr-Aug (5.56mm)
Shotgun	8	20	1	5+1	T	Ithaca M-37 (12-Gauge)
Shotgun, Semi-auto	8	20	3	8+1	Т	Fiachi-Law 12 (12-Gauge)
Damage: The weap	on's damag	e dice poo	l. Firearms d	leliver lethal	l damage.	

Range: This number defines the weapon's practical range in yards, within which attacks are difficulty 6. Up to twice this distance, attacks are difficulty 8. Beyond that, no attacks are possible.

Rate: The maximum number of bullets or three-round bursts this weapon can fire in a turn. Automatic fire and strafing attacks ignore this limit.

Clip: The weapon's ammunition capacity. A "+1" indicates the weapon can carry a round in the chamber, ready to fire.

Concealment: P = Can be carried in pocket; J = Can be hidden in jacket; T = Can be hidden in trench coat; N = Can't be concealed.

*This weapon is capable of three-round bursts, automatic fire and strafing.

THE HEALTH CHART

While ghosts need not worry about health levels, projectors (and mortals) are not so lucky. Such characters physical condition is tracked on the Health chart located on the character sheet. This chart indicates penalties to your dice pool incurred by each level of damage. As a character suffers more injuries, his Health deteriorates and hinders his capabilities. If the injuries are severe enough, he may fall unconscious or even die.

Every mortal character has eight health levels, spanning from Bruised to Incapacitated. Characters with no injuries (no health levels checked off) are "in the pink." Characters suffering injuries severe enough to drive them below Incapacitated die — perhaps to rise as ghosts themselves. Whenever an attack scores a success on a damage roll, mark one health level on the target's Health chart. Multiple successes score multiple levels of injury. If an attacker achieves two successes on a damage roll against an uninjured character, for example, the victim marks off two boxes, bringing him to Hurt.

The number adjacent to the lowest marked box on a character's Health chart dictates his current dice pool penalty. The more damage a character suffers, the more difficult it is for him to act effectively. It's hard to run with a crunchy ankle and tough to aim with blood running in your eyes. Subtract the dice pool penalty next to the character's lowest marked Health level from any relevant and subsequent action dice pools, except for reflexives. These penalties also hinder movement, as described on the Health Chart table (p. 235).

INCAPACITATED

When a character's Health falls to Incapacitated, he may or may not remain conscious, at the Storyteller's option. Regardless, the character is ineffective until he heals the wound. He may perform reflexive actions normally — provided the character is conscious — but the character may not rise or move, except perhaps to twitch in pain and groan. The Storyteller may request a Willpower roll for the character to do or say anything at all.

APPLYING HEALTH DAMAGE

Characters may suffer two different types of damage: bashing and lethal. Blunt instruments, punches, kicks or other similar trauma inflict bashing damage. Guns, knives and other deadly weapons (or situations) deliver lethal damage. All types of injuries are cumulative, and collectively determine they your character's current Health level.

When marking damage on a wounded character's Health chart, mark a "/" for each level of bashing damage and an "X" for lethal damage. Always fill in empty boxes

Health Level	Dice Pool	Movement Penalty
Bruised	0	Slightly contused; your character suffers no movement or dice pool penal ties.
Hurt	-1	Superficially hurt; your character suffers no movement penalties.
Injured	-1	Hurt; your character's movement is impaired slightly (halve maximum running speed).
Wounded	-2	Significantly wounded; your character may not run, though he may stil walk or jog.
Mauled	-2	Badly hurt; your character may hobble no more than three yards per turn
Crippled	-5	Extremely hurt; your character may crawl no more than one yard per turr
Incapacitated		Dire injury; possibly unconscious; your character may do nothing, take nactions and, if unconscious, attempt only certain reflexives (such as soak)
Dead		The only way you're getting up is as a ghost.

first, beginning from the highest Health level (Bruised) and working down.

When a character suffers a mixture of bashing and lethal damage, lethal damage goes at the top, bashing below. Lethal damage accrued by a character already suffering from one or more levels of bashing damage pushes the bashing damage down the chart. For example, if a character has already sustained two levels of bashing damage (and therefore has two "/" marks, one in Bruised and one in Hurt), then suffers a level of lethal damage, the character receives an "X" mark in his Bruised box. The two "/" marks are then pushed down so they occupy the boxes for Hurt and Injured. The player then applies further bashing damage to Wounded and beyond, while further lethal damage begins at Hurt, pushing down any bashing damage (as described above).

Once a character's Health chart is full of marks — regardless of whether they are "X" or "/" marks — any further damage converts any "/" mark to "X" on a one-to-one basis. At this point, the character is so badly trashed that there's no longer a distinction between bashing and lethal damage. Both types of damage simply marks an "X" over previously recorded bashing damage, again working from the top down.

Example: Kate is on beach and researching in the university library various legends of the afterlife. She starts when a shelf full of books tumbles to the marble floor. "Sister," a hollow voice hisses, echoing up and down the aisles of the empty library. The scattered books whirl and tumble in a small cyclone, their pages flapping frenetically before the books sail in her direction, the impact of the heavy volumes driving her to her knees. The bibliographic onslaught inflicts three levels of bashing damage, so her player, Genevieve, marks a "/" next to the first three Health levels: Bruised, Hurt and Injured. Kate scrambles around the corner to escape the fusillade. As the furor dies, she hears footsteps. Glancing up, she sees a student rushing in her direction, apparently eager to help. Not until too late does she see the madness in his eyes and the knife in his hand: a skinrider. He plunges the blade into

her chest, and she feels a sick scraping as the tip slides across her rib. The attack inflicts two levels of lethal damage, so Genevieve marks the Bruised and Hurt boxes with an "X." Since she already suffered three levels of bashing damage, she therefore marks a "f" in each of the three wound levels below Hurt: Wounded, Mauled and Crippled.

Kate's in trouble.

All of the above applies to damage dealt to mortals. Projected sleepers and ghosts work a little differently. Skimmers, as mentioned before, shunt the damage to their physical bodies as bashing, applying damage successes not canceled by soak successes to the Health chart. Unfortunately for skimmers, this sympathetic connection is a two-way street: Skimmers feel the pain of the wounds inflicted on their mortal bodies fully and a skimmer's gauze reflects this. Further, wound penalties accrued by the skimmer; sbody are applied to all actions taken by the skimmer, even in ghost form.

Similarly, sleepers can suffer physical damage while projecting, though for different reasons. Since a sleeper's connection to his body is more distant than a skimmer's, the sympathetic connection is weaker. This means damage inflicted on a sleeper's gauze is not applied to his flesh. This tenuous link, however, allows a sleeper to use his body as an emotional filter of sorts, channeling unwanted Spite points to his physical self. While this ability means sleepers are less likely to be overwhelmed by Spite, it is not without a price. For each temporary Spite point channeled in this fashion, the sleeper's body suffers one level of bashing damage that he cannot soak. Hence, players apply Spite to the Health chart box as a "•". While a sleeper's connection to his physical form is weaker than a skimmer's, it is strong enough that, like a skimmer's, projecting sleepers suffer the effects of wounds to their mortal shell, including full dice pool and movement penalties. Outside of this channeling, projecting sleepers do not suffer health level damage; any damage applied shreds Vitality as if the sleeper were a true ghost. Once the sleeper returns to his body, the channeled Spite

points remain in effect as wounds and do not contribute to an increase in the Spite rating. Instead, sleepers are subjected to a battery of psychotherapy treatments designed to drain off the excess Spite (treatments Orpheus trains sleepers to do on their own as well). While not projecting, sleepers are cleansed of one Spite point per day, thus healing the injuries at the same time. The next time the sleeper projects, the player must immediately convert any remaining Spite points in the Health chart to the Spite chart, possibly increasing a Spite rating.

Spirits and hues do not suffer Health level damage at all. Instead, damage shreds their gauze (represented by a loss of Vitality). While this frees ghosts from the concerns of the flesh, they are not invulnerable. When reduced to zero Vitality, the ghost automatically converts a point of available Willpower for three Vitality to remain cogent. A ghost or sleeper reduced to zero Vitality and zero Willpower before it can reinfuse itself with Vitality discorporates completely, effectively dying. Before this happens, there are several means of recourse, however, though few are without consequence. For more on how damage applies to Vitality, see the section on Vitality, below.

APPLYING VITALITY DAMAGE

Ghosts and projecting sleepers suffer damage differently from humans and skimmers even though, just as when a human is struck, the character still uses his Stamina to roll soak. Successful attacks of this nature shred one point of Vitality for each bashing damage success not canceled by a soak success, and two points of Vitality for each lethal damage success.

Example: Craig slipped into the shadows out of habit, careful to avoid notice. His hunters were good men, and well trained. He'd served with some of them in a former life. No longer. They were taut, cool and calculating as they swept the room. Craig relaxed slightly, confidant that the darkness and his state would provide sufficient cover.

Then he heard the lead officer bark, "Goggles." Each man reached for the rig on his head and swung the goggles into position. They weren't thermal, or light gathering or anything Craig had ever seen. An unholy red glow outlined each man's eye sockets. It gave their faces a skeletal appearance.

They were looking right at him.

Calmly, Craig rose to his feet, confident they couldn't touch him. He didn't see the lead officer release his grip on his MP-5 and draw the Sig. The pistol's bark was an exclamation point punctuating the rattle of automatic gunfire, and Craig felt the bullet tear through his gauze...

The Storyteller informs Craig's player, Harry, that the blessed bullet inflicts three points of lethal damage, of which Craig soaks one. Since he's a Hue, rather than suffering damage to his Health levels, Craig loses 4 points of Vitality for the two points of lethal damage that got through!

Shocked, Craig touches the ragged tear in his shoulder. He's bleeding. He's been dead for months, but he's bleeding again.

As a spooks accumulates Vitality damage, his grip over his gauze fades (see Manifesting, p. 82). He is simply unable to focus to the degree required to sustain cohesion. Rather than simply dissipating, this is a gradual process, though spooks have several options to recover Vitality, as indicated in Chapter Three (see Vitality, p. 188).

HEALING TIMES

Healing takes time, and a severe injury can beach a projector for weeks, if not months. The following section explains how humans (including projectors) heal, while recovering Vitality is discussed in Chapter Three (p. 191). Every level of damage (or point of Vitality) must be recovered individually, so a character Incapacitated by bashing damage must spend the full 12 hours at that level before recovering to Crippled. Once healed to this point, he must spend another six hours before reaching Mauled, and so on. Unlike Health level damage, Vitality points refresh at a rate of one per hour if the character has a body and is occupying said body (which means only projectors can recuperate Vitality so quickly, and only skimmers can do it when they wish; a sleeper cannot regenerate Vitality until awake). This also means projectors on beach may act as batteries for ghostly allies, resting and giving their compatriots Vitality.

HEALING BASHING DAMAGE

Bashing damage, usually accrued through blunt trauma and brawling combat, heals more quickly than lethal damage and usually doesn't require special medical attention. The wounds eventually heal on their own. That said, such injuries are not without short-term consequences. A blow to the head may impair a character's vision or hearing, while internal bruising may cause excruciating pain until it heals. The nature of an injury's secondary effects rests with the Storyteller.

HEALING TIMES FOR BRISHING DAMAGE Health Level Recovery Time Bruised to Wounded One hour each Mauled Three hours Crippled Six hours Incapacitated Twelve hours

HEALING LETHAL DAMAGE

Lethal wounds, including those accumulated through bashing damage beyond incapacitated, place characters in serious jeopardy and are slow to heal. Such injuries may result from bullets, blades or even a severe beating, provided the injury inflicted raises the damage from bashing to lethal. If the wound itself isn't fatal, the combination of blood loss, shock and trauma might be.

Any lethal damage beyond Injured requires medical attention to stabilize the wound. The character must find a way to stop the bleeding, or splint the injury or whatever else is appropriate to the situation. For every hour that passes without sufficient medical attention, the character suffers one further Health level of bashing damage. A character may attempt to aid himself (provided he is not Incapacitated), though remember to apply any Health level penalties to the Medicine roll. A single success on an Intelligence/Wits + Medicine/Survival roll allows a character to stop his own bleeding or aid someone else.

Once the character stops the bleeding, he may usually recover at home with rest and reasonable care. That said, if the character suffered so much damage that he is Crippled (or worse), he must receive professional medical attention at an adequately equipped hospital, doctor's office or clinic. Failing this, he continues suffering one health level of lethal damage for each day that passes without treatment. While the initial injury didn't kill the character, complications like infection or organ failure still could.

Storytellers should note that while a skimmer only suffers bashing damage, there reaches a point when the "/"s becomes "X"s on the Health Chart. When this happens, the damage is severe enough to cause internal injuries and thus becomes lethal damage on its own. In these instances, the Storyteller must treat the injuries as lethal, and thus apply the preceding rules for healing and recovering.

	G TIMES FOR
	LDAMAGE
Health Level	Recovery Time
Bruised	One day
Hurt	Three days
Injured	One week
Wounded	One month
Mauled	Two months
Crippled	Three months
Incapacitated	Five months

STATES OF BEING

Even before their recruitment into Orpheus, the characters lived dangerous lives, constantly skirting the bleeding edge between life and death. Now that they cross that line on a regular basis, such issues have only grown worse. Even ignoring the risk of injury and death (or in the case of ghosts and projected sleepers, shredding), there are innumerable threats to the body, the mind and the soul. The following systems present a variety of ways where the characters can suffer harm, up to and including death itself.

CROSSING OVER

For the average person, death is to be feared. It is the undiscovered country, whence no one may return. Agents of Orpheus have a slightly different perspective on the matter, however. Projectors cross this barrier repeatedly, and whether they realize it or not are better prepared to deal with the afterlife than the ordinary man. Most projectors who die, whether in the line of duty or otherwise, are reborn as spirits. Those unfortunates who succumb to pigment during life, however, are in a different situation; regardless of whether they used the drug at the behest of Terrel & Squib or mainlined/popped/snorted it for a quick high, deceased pigment users who undergo multiple near-death experiences become hues.

Crossing over is a traumatic event, one with which most people are ill-equipped to cope. It is either a screaming cacophony of dread and pain or an overwhelming sense of peace and light. Either way, it's sometimes too much for the human mind to bear. The body dies while the soul scrambles to maintain cohesion and identity. Unfortunately, this is not a kind world, and the flesh that once provided sanctuary against reality's harsh inevitabilities evaporates. Suddenly, the soul is naked, laid bare for all to see including the ghost himself. Those who succumb to this abrupt chrysalis become trapped somewhere shy of the afterlife, usually becoming blips or drones. Since projectors deal with this trauma on a regular basis before their actual death, they rarely fall victim to this malaise, and instead become full-fledged ghosts. They know the shock awaiting them in the "becoming," when they stand revealed to the world, their flesh and sole defense against reality gone.

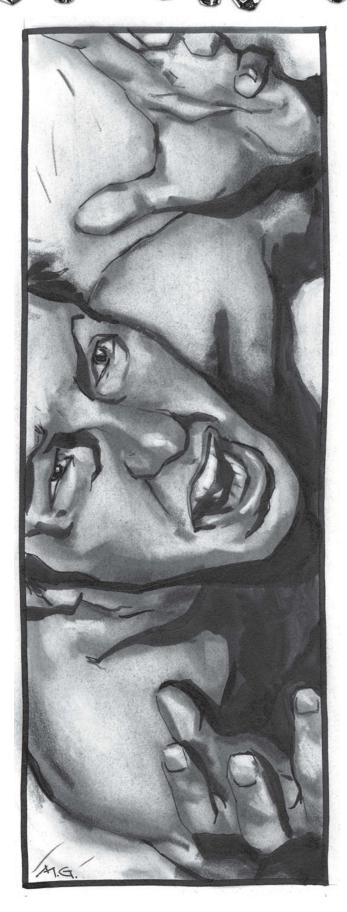
DERANGEMENTS

Derangements are the human mind's way of dealing with events and circumstances that are beyond endurance — or possibly comprehension. When the mind confronts information and emotions far outside an ordered and reasoned reality (even if that reality is a delusion), it attempts to quell the conflict by introducing aberrant behavior like schizophrenia or hysteria to ease or distance the psychological tension.

Ghosts, in particular, are vulnerable to such mental stresses, since the brain is no longer bound by the need to preserve the body. Where once flesh and mind worked in concert toward self-preservation, a ghost's psychology harbors no such directive. Drones are especially vulnerable to manias and neuroses since their repetitive natures eliminate the mind's need to remain flexible and adaptable, instead allowing it to adopt patterns that sustain the prison in which they dwell.

Even if a ghost or projector can handle the day-to-day psychological stresses placed on him, there are other, more sinister things lurking at the edges of our world. Such mysteries can sometimes shatter the ego in an instant.

Whereas in humans derangements usually are only the outward sign of such imbalance, ghosts and projec-



tors have other telltales. Derangements often manifest hand in hand with Stains. Each time a spook gains a new Stain during play, he must make a Willpower roll (difficulty equal to his current Spite rating) or gain a derangement. The Storyteller should work with the player to determine an appropriate mania, but ultimately, the choice is up to the Storyteller. Botching this roll turns the ghost or projected entity into a basket case: He gains two derangements. Beyond this, particularly traumatic events, like draining a loved one's Vitality, being tortured or watching a fellow crucible member become a Spectre are also avenues to gaining derangements. Ultimately, the decision on whether an event triggers a derangement or not is up to the Storyteller, though remember that an obsessive/compulsive, hysterical, paranoid schizophrenic probably won't be much fun to roleplay.

Releasing a low Vitality ghost from this existence (as described in Default Abilities, p. 82, 148-151) can ease the guilt and stress of existence tremendously. Each time a character is directly responsible for saving a ghost from all her tethers, the character may make a Willpower roll (difficulty equal to his current Spite rating) to eliminate one derangement from which he currently suffers.

Derangements can be challenging to roleplay in an accurate fashion, but a little time and research can lead to an unforgettable roleplaying experience.

FUGUE

Victims of fugue often suffer from blackouts and loss of memory. These symptoms usually cover a period of time during which the individual followed a rote series of behaviors designed to correct circumstances particularly disturbing to the sufferer. These behaviors are rigid and specific, and rarely differ from incident to incident. Unlike multiple personality disorder, the victim does not develop a secondary or tertiary personality to deal with the problem, and instead locks into a specific set of patterns. It's like the victim is on autopilot or is sleepwalking. Decide on the circumstance triggering this response: Encountering a childlike blip, attack by a Spectre or suffering a severe loss of Vitality such that your gauze shows the more extreme signs of your death.

Once the character undergoes the chosen situation, his player makes a Willpower roll (difficulty 8). If failed, the character enters a trance-like state. The player should roleplay this situation; failure to do so means the character passes to the Storyteller's control for a number of scenes equal to the die roll. During this period, the Storyteller may have the character act as he sees fit to remove the source of anxiety. At the end of the fugue, the character regains consciousness with no memory of his actions.

HYSTERIA

A character in the grip of hysteria cannot check his emotions, and suffers from severe mood swings and violent fits when subjected to stress or anxiety. Hysterical behavior is usually characterized by an inability to calm down, whether from fright, anger or grief. Storytellers should decide on a trigger particular to the character that prompts his episodes, such as confronting Spectres, confinement or combat.

Whenever the character encounters a situation that could trigger his hysteria, his player must make a Willpower roll to avoid suffering the derangement's effects. The difficulty is usually 6, though it may rise to 8 if the stress is especially sudden or severe.

MANIC-DEPRESSION

Manic-Depressives suffer extreme mood swings, usually resulting from severe trauma or anxiety. It seems as though the sufferer has two distinct personalities: One cheery and confident, the other pessimistic and lethargic.

This disorder can be particularly severe in ghosts. While in life, the need for self-preservation encourages the mind to temper its emotional state; a ghost, however, suffers no such restriction. Whenever a character fails a task, the Storyteller may make a secret Willpower roll (difficulty 8). If the player fails the roll, his character lapses into bitter depression. If the player botches any roll (or his temporary Willpower drops below 2), the character automatically suffers the effects of Manic-Depression. Thanks to their emotionally mercurial state, ghosts recover quickly and the effects of this derangement last only for the remainder of the scene.

A character in a depressed state shreds one point of Vitality every hour for the duration of the scene. When he emerges from his funk, he is relentlessly upbeat and energetic, driven by his mania. During the following scene, the character gains one Spite rating temporarily (unless this propels him into Spectre-hood), which drains off at the end of the scene when the character's emotional state stabilizes.

MEGALOMANIA

Those afflicted with this derangement obsess over accumulating power and wealth, regardless of personal cost. This perceived growth in stature salves the individual's latent insecurities by reassuring him that he's the baddest motherfucker on the block. The character is invariably arrogant and supremely sure of his abilities, thoroughly convinced of his own superiority. Megalomaniacal behavior can take many forms, from unconscionable violence to intricate schemes designed to demonstrate the individual's superior mind. These individuals perceive any individual of equal or greater status than themselves as "competition."

Characters with this derangement struggle constantly to rise to the top of the world, and if they can't, they strive to make the world a little smaller until they can. The character may try proving himself better than everyone else. When that fails, he discounts the rest of the world and works to be better than anyone in Orpheus. In the megalomaniac's worldview, there are two types

of people: The weak and the competition. This belief extends to everyone, even close friends and loved ones. This derangement grants the character an extra die on all Willpower rolls, thanks to the character's supreme — and likely affected — confidence.

MULTIPLE PERSONALITIES

Those suffering Multiple Personality Disorder are driven to create additional "selves" as a means of shelter against some trauma. Usually, this allows the primary personality to deny the experience or his subsequent actions by blaming the incidents on "someone else." Sometimes, MPD sufferers create only a single additional self, though just as often, there can be as many as three, four or more. Regardless, a secondary personality usually only responds to a specific emotional stimulus: An abused child might develop a "bad boy" persona to justify the abuse, while a rape victim's second personality might be childlike, unable to understand the magnitude of the crime committed against her.

The Storyteller should work with the player to determine how many and what kind of personalities his character manifests, as well as the emotional triggers for these other selves. Each personality should be justified by the event that caused it. Each personality is distinct, and is sometimes even capable of completely different tasks from the primary personality. Occasionally, secondary or tertiary personalities can exhibit Abilities far different from the primary self, perhaps going so far as to have a different Nature and Shade. It is up to the Storyteller to determine the specifics of each MPD case.

OBSESSIVE/COMPULSIVE

Particularly traumatic occurrences often force the mind to focus attention away from the event, and to occupy itself with a single repetitive behavior or action. Usually, an obsession is a symptom of the individual's desire to exert control over his environment, while a compulsion is a habitual action or routine that soothes deep-seated anxieties. A character can be obsessed with personal cleanliness, quiet or privacy; potential compulsions include precisely ordering a series of items, a projector constantly returning to his body to ensure its safety or praying every few hours for salvation from this purgatory.

If a character is obsessive/compulsive, the Storyteller should work with the player to determine an appropriate set of actions or behaviors, as exemplified above. The character strives to follow such a routine to the exclusion of all else, even if his behavior endangers himself or his crucible. The character may ignore the disorder for one scene by spending a Willpower point.

PARANOIA

Paranoids believe that not only does their suffering and grief have a cause, but that cause has a name. Everyone is out to get them. They obsess over their persecution

complexes, often spinning vast and intricate webs of conspiracy designed to explain who tortures them and why. Anyone the character believes is "one of them" becomes the subject of his rage, fear or — at the very least — distrust.

Characters who suffer from paranoia have trouble interacting with others; the difficulties of all Social dice rolls increase by one. The character is distrustful of everyone and even keeps fellow operatives at arm's length. The slightest indication of suspicious behavior — real or imagined — is enough to provoke a Willpower roll to retain control, with the difficulty determined by the Storyteller based on the severity of the incident. Possible examples of "them" include law enforcement authorities, NextWorld or even all the blips who are scheming to drag a character "down."

SCHIZOPHRENIA

Schizophrenia is usually characterized by conflicting, unresolved feelings or impulses, and it usually manifests in withdrawal from reality, radical behavior shifts, hallucinations and, sometimes, even violence. Schizophrenia is the derangement most people commonly recognize as "crazy," and it can cause anything from conversations with furniture, to delusions of grandeur (like believing yourself the first Emperor of the United States), to acknowledging and following your cat's murderous demands. Storytellers should note that characters who communicate with unmanifested spooks will most likely be diagnosed as schizophrenic by the medical community.

Portraying this derangement requires careful consideration, since you must decide on a set of behaviors relevant to the trauma responsible for the derangement. Hallucinations, bizarre behavior and delusions spring from an intractable conflict of self that cannot be resolved. First, determine the nature of this conflict, then decide on what kind of behavior it causes.

When exposed to situations triggering this derangement, a character may spend a Willpower point to ignore the effects until the scene concludes.

DISEASE

Ghosts, thanks to their very nature, are removed from the ravages of disease save for those symptoms exhibited in their death marks (which aren't actually diseases but memories of the person's mortality). Projectors, however, are not spared from such misfortunes. While a projector's gauze is free from such dangers, the body is not as fortunate, and an unlucky projector can pick up a disease on beach. Since Orpheus maintains strict decontamination procedures both prior to and following projection (especially with sleepers), this is rarely a worry. Serious diseases, however — or those with no known cure — present a danger nonetheless.

That said, Orpheus takes good advantage of its disembodied agents' immunity to disease. This ability means

Orpheus deploys ghosts where no human agent can safely go, and the government is well aware of this advantage. A particularly effective crucible, for example, might find itself investigating the danger of a Third World nation's chemical and biological weapons assets.

Even though Orpheus carefully screens its operatives for contamination, it is loath to cut loose an operative, even if he is infected. Though infected projectors are isolated from their compatriots in body (most are assigned to sleeper duty), they can operate normally in the field, since no known contaminants are transmittable from gauze to gauze.

Characters with appropriate training can develop antidotes and remedies for diseases. Although finding a cure for HIV should not occur within the framework of your game, an Intelligence + Medicine roll (difficulty 7) allows a character to detect the presence of HIV, hepatitis or other ailments (provided the character has access to the appropriate equipment). Perhaps the character can even prepare a "cocktail" of drugs to forestall such diseases' progress. Developing a cure for less tenacious diseases can still take days, months or even years. This is an extended action (Intelligence + Medicine), with a goal of 10 successes or more depending on the severity of the ailment. Similarly, the difficulty depends on the nature of the disease. Further, particularly exotic or ill-understood diseases may require as many as 100 successes. Generally, researching a cure allows one roll per week of lab time, assuming roughly 40 hours of work.

If a character suffers from a disease, he may accrue damage over time depending on the disease's virulence and his Stamina. The Storyteller determines how often the character must face damage from this malady, and how many dice compose the damage dice pool. Usually, diseases do bashing damage, but a particularly deadly pathogen might cause lethal damage. Further, the difficulty on the soak roll could increase over time, with the disease spreading throughout the character's system, gradually overcoming his natural defenses. While ghosts are in no danger of infection, projectors suffer this damage normally; remember that damage to the flesh impedes a projector's gauze, as well.

DROWNING

While ghosts and projecting entities do not need air to survive, the same can't be said of humans. A human can drown if submerged completely, if held underwater, or if a swimming roll botches and the Storyteller is cranky that night. A human can hold his breath as indicated on the following chart:

Stamina	Holding Breath	
1	30 seconds	
2,	One minute	
3	Two minutes	
4	Four minutes	
5	Eight minutes	

Players may spend Willpower to continue holding their character's breath beyond the time allotted on the table above; each point spent grants another 30 seconds if Stamina is 3 or lower, or another full minute if Stamina is 4 or higher.

When a character can no longer hold his breath, he begins drowning or suffocating, depending on the environment, until dead or rescued. A drowning character suffers one lethal health level each turn, with no soak roll. The healing period doesn't begin until the character stops suffering such damage. When a drowning or suffocating character reaches Incapacitated, he survives for one additional minute per point of Stamina, at which point, he dies.

Drowning cannot harm ghosts in this fashion since their gauze has no need for oxygen to sustain itself.

ELECTROCUTION

While 50,000 volts can put a crimp in almost any-body's day, it does little harm to ghosts and projected entities. As with most damage incurred to a ghost's gauze, electrical damage simply shreds one point of Vitality per turn of exposure until the ghost spends a point of Willpower to render himself immune to physical damage for the scene. Humans (and beached projectors) are not so fortunate. If a vulnerable character comes in contact with a source of electricity without appropriate insulation, he suffers damage as dictated on the following table:

Health Levels/Tur	n Electrical Source
One	Minor; wall socket
Two	Major; vehicle battery
Three	Severe; protective fence, junction box
Four	Fatal; main feed line, subway rail

Characters reduced to Incapacitated by electrical damage may suffer some long-term disability, ranging from physical impairment (loss of Physical Attributes) to memory loss or brain damage (loss of Mental Attributes) to disfigurement (reduced Appearance). The Storyteller determines whether a character's injuries are severe enough to warrant any of these.

Although electrical damage can be debilitating, characters can undertake precautions. A sufficiently grounded character will suffer reduced damage, while a character standing knee deep in water may suffer more. While armor won't grant soak dice against electricity, grounded characters may roll between 0 and 3 soak dice at the Storyteller's option.

EXPLOSIVES

Ghosts and projected entities subjected to explosive damage simply lose one point of Vitality per turn or scene, depending on their condition (and provided the explosives aren't supernatural in some way). Explosives vary widely in power and application, from incendiary devices that simply start fires to fragmentation devices that send showers of deadly shrapnel in every direction. Characters can use explosives against enemies or objects, including pipe bombs, plastique, dynamite or even fireworks.

Storytellers should remember that while explosives are not readily available to the average Joe, Orpheus is well-connected enough that they might procure such hardware. Provided the need is sufficient, the characters might even receive military-grade devices.

A character may throw explosives, like grenades or pipe bombs, or set them in stationary locations and detonate them with timers or remote triggers. When a character throws an explosive, the player rolls Dexterity + Demolitions/Athletics to determine the accuracy of the toss. If the bomb is set to explode to the tune of a timer or trigger, the player should roll Dexterity + Stealth to place it without being detected and Wits/Intelligence + Demolitions to determine whether the character configured the bomb correctly. A botch on this roll may very well detonate the bomb on the spot or indicate that the character dropped a live grenade at his feet.

A grenade or bomb does damage as indicated on the Explosives Chart, that value being the damage inflicted at ground zero. Reduce damage by one die for each yard beyond the epicenter. Extra successes scored in an explosives attack (whether thrown or set) do not increase the damage inflicted.

EXPLOSIVE	ES .				
Type Damage	Conceal	Exemplar			
Incendiary*	4	P	Molotov Cocktail		
Concussion**	8	P	Concussion Grenade		
Shredding	10	P	Fragmentation Grenade		
Single Destructive	15	P	Stick of Dynamite		
High Explosive***	20	Variable	Plastique		
*Incendiary devices ignite the target (see Fire, below). Damage delivered by the explosion is bashing, though damage caused by fire is lethal.					
**Concussion explosives deliver bashing damage and knock down the target (see Knockdown, p. XX).					
***Timed or triggered bombs that hold a variable amount of dynamite, plastique or similar explosives cause damage to surrounding structures and ignite flammable materials, which complicate damage. The figures listed are suggestions only.					

If an explosives attack roll misses, the Storyteller should determine where and when the explosion takes place and whom it catches in the blast. The intended target is always assumed outside such a blast radius. For thrown explosives, randomly determine a direction from the target where the blast occurs, then place the explosion far enough from the target such that he escapes unscathed. For set explosives, determine how much time passes before the device actually detonates, if it explodes at all.

Unless stated otherwise, explosives inflict lethal damage. Armor can protect against the force of an explosion, as well as the shrapnel, but unless the armor specifically protects against heat and flame, incendiary devices inflict full damage, even against armored targets.

The Explosives Chart details a few examples from the broad spectrum of explosives. Many variables exist in bomb construction, so feel free to create your own unique recipe for a whole mess of destruction in a teeny-tiny living space.

FALLING

Legend has it that those who fall from great heights are dead before they ever hit the ground, and the fact that spooks suffer damage from falls as though still living lends some credence to this story. Barring supernatural attacks, falling damage is the only way a physical, mundane event can harm an unmanifested ghost or projected sleeper (though as usual they shred Vitality rather than suffer health levels). Regardless, the chart below lists the number of damage dice the Storyteller rolls. If a character falls 30 feet or less, he can mitigate damage by clutching outcroppings or tumbling upon impact. Make a Dexterity + Athletics roll against the difficulty listed on the chart. Each success on this roll reduces the damage dice pool of the fall by one, while a botch moves the fall one step up on the table (so a fall of 30 feet becomes a fall of 40 feet). Any remaining damage successes are bashing, against which the character rolls soak normally. If a character falls more than 30 feet, no amount of acrobatics can help: Damage is lethal, and cannot be soaked.

Certain types of armor may help characters resist bashing or lethal damage inflicted by a fall, at the Story-teller's discretion (though even then, it provides only half its usual protection). The surface upon which a ghost or projected entity lands makes little difference. Humans, on the other hand, benefit greatly from falling into water or on a soft surface, as opposed to concrete. The numbers on the chart assume a hard surface ends the character's fall.

FIRE

The nature, extent and temperature of a fire all influence its destructiveness. The greatest danger arises when clothes ignite, as the character continues suffering damage even after the initial onset of flames. While ghosts and projected entities do suffer damage from fire normally when manifesting, they aren't very flammable. The incorporeal nature of gauze prevents the character from igniting. The Storyteller rolls no damage dice for fire; the character simply loses health levels as if the Storyteller rolled successes. Further, fire is lethal damage, and characters may not soak it unless wearing protective garments specifically designed to mitigate the effects of fire and extreme heat.

Health Levels/ Turn One	Size of Fire Clothing or hair on fire; body part exposed to torch or similar small flame.
Two	Bonfire; half the body exposed to extensive flames.
Three	Inferno; entire body engulfed in raging fire.

POISONS AND DRUGS

A poisonous or intoxicating substance introduced into the body limits a character's ability to perform, at best. At worst, it's deadly. It's impossible to discuss every poison or drug a character might encounter, but the list below offers direction on how to handle the more common examples.

While it is difficult — if not impossible — for a ghost to abuse such substances, projectors are not so blessed. In fact, instances of drug and alcohol abuse among projectors are disproportionately high compared to the populace at large. This is mostly because Orpheus recruits survivors of multiple near-death experiences. A few are simply unlucky, but many seek out such situations, either consciously or unconsciously. Drug and alcohol abuse fits right in with this bleeding edge lifestyle.

• Alcohol: At Storyteller's discretion, subtract one die from any Dexterity, Perception, Intelligence or Wits dice pool for every drink a character has in the space of an hour. This effect fades at the rate of one die per hour until the penalty falls to zero and the alcohol is purged from the character's system.

FALLING DAMAGE						
Feet	Save Roll	Difficulty	Damage Dice			
10	Dex + Athletics	7	2 (bashing)			
20	Dex + Athletics	8	5 (bashing)			
30	Dex + Athletics	9	10 (bashing)			
40	None		10 (lethal)			
50	None		10 (lethal)			
60	None		10 (lethal)			

- Cocaine/crack/speed: A character may experience a +1 increase in Strength or Stamina while on any of these drugs, but he may also become edgy and paranoid. The Storyteller determines the impact of the drug, based on the volume consumed, its purity and the character's state of mind. A particularly vicious dose might cause a character to suffer the effects of Paranoia for the scene (see Derangements, p. 238).
- Hallucinogens: All dice pools lose one to three dice depending on the strength of the drug. A character under the influence may suffer confusing, frightening or infuriating hallucinations, though he may realize these things are occurring only in his mind, particularly if he's aware of the drug's presence in his system. This requires an Intelligence + Streetwise/Empathy roll, difficulty 6. The difficulty rises to 8 if the character is unaware he's doped up. Depending on the nature of the trip, the character may actually gain dice in a pool for a relevant Trait that's enhanced by the drug. The effect lasts for (8 Stamina) hours.
- Heroin/Morphine/Barbiturates: Each of these drugs is a strong painkiller, but they cause the character to enter a dreamy state for (8 Stamina) hours. During this time, the player reduces all the character's dice pools by two, but dice pool penalties incurred by Health level damage are also halved (rounded down).
- Marijuana: For every hit a character takes from a joint or bong within an hour, subtract one die from any Dexterity, Perception, Intelligence or Wits dice pools. This effect fades completely within one hour of the character's last toke, unless he resumes lighting up.
- Pigment: Also called "black heroin," pigment is the latest drug to hit the streets. Pigment is highly addictive but cheap, and it has rapidly spread among both casual and habitual drug users. Ravers, college students and hard core addicts alike all ride the "midnight train." While most users treat pigment as a street variant of heroin — indeed, the effects are roughly similar — pigment is also a mild hallucinogen and is taken in a variety of forms. The casual drug crowd pops pigment pills, while hardcore addicts shoot or smoke it. An unusual side effect of the drug, however, is that users frequently report seeing "ghosts." Although most people dismiss these claims, Orpheus believes the drug gives people the ability to spot a projector or a ghost's gauze. Why this is so remains unclear, as is the reason why pigment addicts who undergo near-death experiences become hues. Orpheus is still trying to research the matter, and is asking agents to procure the drug when on assignments if it doesn't jeopardize the mission or Orpheus' reputation.

Pigment has various effects depending on how a user introduces it into his body. Each persists for [8 minus Stamina] hours. The drug acts as a hallucinogen for smokers. They experience a trippy high in which the gates of the subconscious open wide and old memories flood forth in five-sense stereo. Those for whom a Wits + Awareness roll succeeds (difficulty 6) can sift through memories and focus on pleasant ones. Those for whom a roll fails are

simply along for the ride, while those whose rolls botch remember horrible, terrible things they thought they'd forgotten. Most pigment smokers can see ghosts, but often mistake them for errant memories. They can't project, nor can they hear spirits, and they lose one die on all dicepools for any action pursued in this state.

Pill poppers enjoy a high somewhere between that of a hallucinogen and heroin. It's an ecstatic state in which the user grows sedate and sexually aroused, but the neural bundles that dictate what each sense comprehends seem to misfire. Users undergo synesthesia, tasting colors, smelling music or hearing tactile stimuli, thus partially accounting for the hallucinogenic effects of the drug. Some people experience full-blown phantasms, with the same Wits + Awareness roll (difficulty 6) described above required to control the images. A pill popper's Willpower drops by half, while all dice rolls for them suffer a two-die penalty. Poppers can not only see ghosts, they hear them as well. They also sense the tethers between their bodies and souls snapping. Some might see a gauze arm emerge from their real arm or find themselves hovering above their bodies for a few seconds. Few users have the wherewithal to complete the process, though. Those who do must really concentrate (expending two Willpower points) to walk out of their bodies and effectively project. The effort makes them extremely vulnerable — both mentally and physically — to predation by actual ghosts, which is why few who manage to reach this state do so a second time. When the effects of the drug subside, a popper is left with one Willpower and is probably "burnt" from the experience. See below for the effects of pigment projection.

The final means of taking pigment is mainlining directly into the bloodstream, as with heroin. These effects are similar to barbiturates', detailed above, except that the user can see, hear and speak with ghosts as though they're living beings. He can also project by spending one Willpower point. This is the preferred method of projecting among the street crowd (street projectors). Their Willpower rating functions as their Vitality rating (as a quick rule of thumb for supporting characters). Those with very low Willpower are equal to drones and blips, while those of singular intent are almost equal in strength to the characters, but without Horrors. Storytellers may rule that regular street projectors can eventually use Horrors and even manifest, but such individuals are few and far between.

- **Poison:** The nature and strength of the poison determines how badly it damages a victim and how often. As a general rule, a character suffers one to three levels of bashing damage per scene. Particularly deadly poisons may inflict more injury, cause lethal damage or even hurt a character every turn. The damage continues accumulating until the effects wear off or the character receives an antidote.
- Salmonella: Characters contract Salmonella by consuming contaminated food. Within an hour of eating, a character becomes nauseated and suffers one Health level of bashing damage (no soak). Thereafter, he loses one die from all Dexterity and Strength dice pools for (8-Stamina) hours.

TEMPERATURE EXTREMES

Extreme heat or cold can severely impair a character's effectiveness, from his physical ability to his cognitive functions and reasoning. The core temperature of the human body generally hovers around 98 degrees Fahrenheit, and while our physiology can account for tiny variances, even a few degrees up or down can spell disaster. Hypothermia and heat stroke both have dire consequences for humans, though the disembodied are immune to these effects.

While the systems below portray the dangers of extreme heat and cold, remember that the human body acclimates itself to local weather conditions over time. A character from the Caribbean feels the effects of extreme cold long before an Alaskan!

HYPOTHERMA

Generally, hypothermia is not a danger unless the temperature falls below about 40 degrees Fahrenheit. That said, wind and rain increase the risk dramatically, and symptoms of hypothermia can appear at temperatures as high as 60 degrees. A drop in core temperature brings on a variety of symptoms including weakness and fatigue (in early stages); loss of coordination and judgment (later); and finally drowsiness, unconsciousness and death. Provided a character dresses appropriately to his environment, there is no danger. That said, if a character is caught out in the cold, the Storyteller should roll for damage. For every five

degrees below 40 (circumstances depending), the character suffers one die of bashing damage, which she may soak normally. The Storyteller should make this roll every 5 minutes, though in particularly extreme circumstances, this period may be shorter. For each health level of damage incurred, the character suffers a one die penalty to all rolls (in addition to penalties incurred by Health damage).

HEAT STROKE

Contrary to common belief, heat stroke is not necessarily a result of exercise or exertion. High temperatures, lack of bodily fluids and overexposure to the elements can all bring about heat stroke. The very young and old are especially susceptible to the hazards of this condition. The first symptom is red, flushed skin and an inability to sweat. This condition further exacerbates the problem as the body is unable to shed excess heat through sweating. Further along, the victim may suffer headaches; rapid, weak and irregular pulse; seizures; unconsciousness; and ultimately death. Heat stroke can be a danger in climates as low as 80 degrees Fahrenheit, though appropriate attire pushes the margin of safety a bit higher. Provided a character dresses suitably, the Storyteller shouldn t invoke these rules unless the temperature rises to over 105 degrees Fahrenheit. In that case, the character suffers one level of bashing damage, which he cannot soak by any means. This damage accumulates at a rate of one health level every 5 minutes and may not be healed until the character escapes to cooler environs.



Somewhere else my heart was beating, but slowly, a forgotten pulse in a sleeping body that was being kept safe for me. Somewhere else I was having a nice nap. If the body was a separate entity from the soul, then my body had currently earned by far the better part of the deal.

The cellar was stacked high with cardboard boxes and packages, stuffed so full of CDs that they creaked gently as they settled. Earlier, I had dropped down through the floor above, and I chose not to manifest yet. It was nine o'clock in the evening, and the staff had already gone home. There wasn't supposed to be any sound in the room; any noise should have come from the street outside... the hooting of maneuvering cars and the casual, fast-paced chatter of passing friends.

Again, the shriek: Brief and agonized.

It came from the corner of the room, behind the high stack of anime music, by the wall bordering the sewer. I considered waiting for the others to join me, or returning to report what I'd heard — positive evidence of a manifestation... yes; definite proof there was something down here... yes; now would you mind coming back with me in case the horrible thing jumps out from behind the door and eats my face? — but decided against it.

I'd looked at my immediate future a few hours earlier, after all, and it hadn't included horrible vivisected aborted babies chewing on my stripped bones. What I saw was myself running through the sewers, holding something small in my arms, trying to stay ahead of the crucible... my crucible. Of course, I didn't know whether they were trying to kill me, or save me from myself, or....

It was painfully clear why most Biblical prophets had gone to live in the desert. It cut down on the if/then alternatives drastically.

I was wasting time. Still intangible, I drifted through the stack and looked down at what lay beyond it.

The creatures lay in a puddle of dark ooze that might have been blood, squirming and twisting around each other in a hateful mimicry of nesting animals. One opened its mouth and screamed again as I watched, the sound echoing around the cellar and humming painfully at the back of my neck. Their eyes had been put out, the skin ripped from their bodies, their legs broken and patterns cut into their flayed flanks. They weren't children. They were cats. Or rather, they had been cats once.

Haven't seen animal ghosts before. Interesting. Part of my brain marked the matter for future consideration. The rest of my mind considered the wasteful action of throwing up. Poor, pitiful, agonized little creatures, trapped here, caught in an endless moment of whimpering pain. Drone-class ghosts, I decided, without any real intelligence or motivation apart from the few shreds of memory that life had left them.

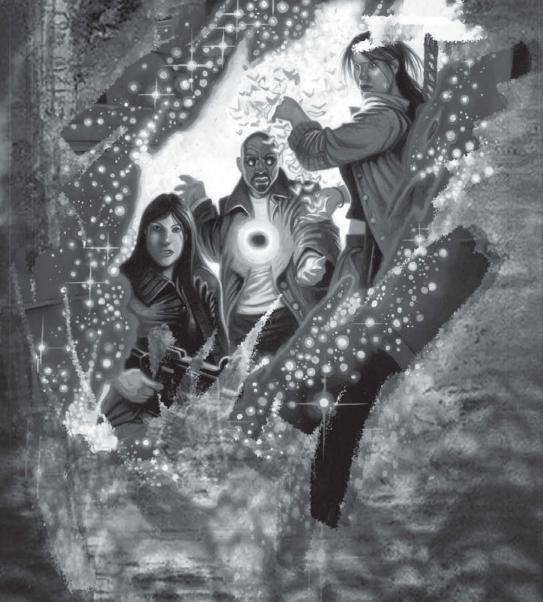
I knelt down a careful few steps away from the writhing puddle of creatures. This was a surprise. I had expected the ghosts of babies, given the history of this place; the home of a convicted abortionist over a century ago, all the pain and misery that should logically have been impressed into the cellar walls. And yet... cats, no babies. So, someone must have killed the cats. But in that case, what happened to the babies?

There was a crash from behind me, and I started to my feet, turning toward the noise. Thin, silvery threads wrapped themselves around fallen CDs that had spilled from a carelessly piled stack. The plastic cases whipped toward me in a quick, clawlike motion, and I dodged, throwing myself to one side and rolling through the next pile of boxes. The CD cases buried themselves in the side of the pile that I'd just dived through like shuriken. More silver threads drifted through the air after me, with the slow leisurely grace of a stalking cat.

I circled, avoiding another strike from the spectral claws, and caught sight of the ghost. Like the others, it had been a cat once, but it had more cohesion than they did, and fewer apparent wounds; there was a feral spark to its eyes, and foam fell from its mouth to vanish upon touching the floor. It mewled, a sharp painful sound, and the blips scrambled from the pool of blood and ooze to answer its call, lengthening claws scraping and scrabbling, mouths open and hungry, blinded eyes turning...

...turning toward me....

CHAPTER FIVE: STORYTELLING THE DEAD



"The cruel irony is, I'm capable of stuff that other magicians don't even dream of... but only when I'm dead."

— John "Blink" Carruthers Gloria Sullivan: What doesn't kill you defines you.

- Zero Effect

Assuming the role of Storyteller is a daunting proposition. Yes, it puts you in the position of knowing a little more of "what's happening" in the world of **Orpheus**. Likewise, it allows you to guide a troupe through the storyline we've provided — you and your players can discover the unfolding events of the Orpheus Group together. On the other hand, acting as Storyteller also means assuming control of the game and, therefore, riding the thin line between too tight a narrative and too little focus. This, to say nothing of the minutia of ensuring the players can meet at certain times and adjusting the chronicle for the inevitable absences, tardiness and general drama accompanying any troupe.

This chapter is meant to give the Storyteller as strong a framework as possible for running **Orpheus**; it discusses the world the characters inhabit, the characters themselves, what possibilities exist for stories and some general guidelines for running games. You'll also find rules and tables for "saving" other ghosts, plus ideas for Storytelling chronicles for characters who are *not* part of Orpheus Group.

BEFORE WE BEGIN

Before diving into the meat of this chapter, we'd like to remind the Storyteller that **Orpheus** is a limited series with a selected number of books. That means each book has a specific story arc associated with it. This also means we've written the books with the assumption that you are playing through the ongoing chronicle we've designed. Now, does that mean you *must* play that chronicle?

Hell, no.

You can diverge from "our" plotline any time your troupe wishes. In fact, we encourage it — if your players decide something you intended as a red herring is really interesting and decide, as a group, to pursue it, let that herring grow into a full-fledged story. Nurture and encourage player unity. That means your troupe is having fun with Orpheus, which is really what we hoped would happen. In fact, just because the books supplementing this tome are written with specific stories in mind does not mean there will be no useful information in them for Storytellers ignoring the pre-planned story arc. It just means Orpheus's setting is fairly specific, and while that might seem limiting, there's a lot you can do within that setting. Indeed, each supplement in the line provides all kinds of new tricks, capabilities and options for character development. With those kinds of avenues open, your players could take the game in almost any direction.

THE WORLD OF ORPHEUS

Understanding the world in which the characters live (or, in some cases, exist) is critical to understanding the characters themselves, and therefore to running the game. **Orpheus** is much like our modern world. People still connect with others across the globe by means of computers, and they still fight over the pettiest details. War rages over many countries, and humanity blindly destroys the very Earth upon which we live. People search for faith, some turning back to ancient beliefs (or recent facsimiles thereof), some looking to the more accepted denominations. Nothing too unfamiliar so far by society's general perceptions.

The difference comes when you look deeper into the shadows. In our "real" world, a darkened alley at night might hold any number of human and mundane dangers, but we understand and are even prepared for them. In the world of the characters, those same shadows might hide muggers, rapists or other human perils — but they could just as easily hide a shambling corpse inhabited by a malevolent ghost. The young girl left home alone has every reason to fear opening the closet door. The giggling teenagers clustered around a Ouija board in a basement might very well call up something horrific. The supernatural is very real, not that this means people believe in it. Just like the real world, nearly everyone has a "ghost story" to tell but most people look askance at anyone else's supernatural experiences. Society labels as lunatics people who insist they've seen ghosts, and almost viciously debunks them. Even Orpheus has its detractors. People believe the skeptics over the folks who claim a supernatural experience, no matter how flimsy the logic of their criticisms, because a world without ghosts is so much more comfortable. After all, if the price of believing in ghosts is the knowledge, or even the suspicion, that every sudden chill is a spiritual intruder in the room, that a howl outside the window might be the wind or a vengeful shade, most people would rather not believe. This attitude is very comforting, until the moment a ghost forcibly makes its presence known; then the hapless skeptics have no protection, psychologically, spiritually or physically.

This is where the Orpheus Group and similar organizations come in, of course. They *know* ghosts exist and that these beings can affect, and even harm, the living. What they choose to do about it (and how much they charge) is another matter.

GHOSTS AND HUMANITY

The living and the dead inhabit the same world. There is no "spirit world" that ghosts and projected entities can escape to, at least none that any member of Orpheus has ever reported. Likewise, spooks perceive the world in the same way humans do. Death (or projection) does not skew one's vision in and of itself, although nothing says ghosts and projected entities cannot perceive the world in inappropriate ways, just as disturbed people do.

Most ghosts do not see others, or even most humans, except insofar as they factor into the ghosts' routines. In fact, most don't know they are dead at all (some might even believe they work for an organization that allows them project their souls out from their bodies and speak with the dead... but more on alternate preludes below). Regardless of how much a ghost realizes or does not realize about her condition, however, she sees the world in the same way a human being might (barring the use of powers that alter her perceptions). This means she interacts with the world in much the same way — she can't see through doors or hear through sound-proof glass (although she can, of course, walk right through either one).

GHOSTS AND AMNESIA

While not specifically a Default Ability, the effects of amnesia are worth noting here as endemic to different spooks. People rarely accept what preternatural reality sometimes throws their way, and instead, try justifying their encounters with the supernatural in the simplest, most logical terms. Glowing eyes are nothing but an odd reflection of light; Spectre-ridden dogs the size of horses are escaped lions from the zoo... everything has its place.

Everything.

In Orpheus, however, society has become more inured to the thought of ghosts. Everyone has a story to tell, and whether they believe in spirits or not, they still share their tales in whispers while glancing at the dark corners of the room, as though the very underworld were listening. With the Orpheus Group and Terrel & Squib offering scientific plausibility for spectral phenomenon, increasing numbers of people are inclined to believe in ghosts — and maybe even see one. They believe the stories about the rocking chair that still moves at night, or the flash-sight of a ghost reflected in the mirror. They believe in the daytime mediums who pander solely to the Nielsen Ratings, and they call psychic hotlines for some significant insight into their own lives. They want desperately to believe, and Orpheus Group validates their faith. In fact, some folks blame common events on ghosts, just to have participated in the phenomenon. A

cool breeze on a summer day whips through the room and pushes a door shut. In the recounting, Mrs. Pendergrass felt a cold presence brush by her arm and slam the door before her — it was her dead sister sending her a message... as she often does on cool summer days.

When innocent people catch sight of ghosts in Orpheus, they're less likely to leave the scene screaming. They'll probably remember the event and ghoulishly treasure it forever. They brushed shoulders with the supernatural... and survived. If only it were that simple. Orpheus Group wisely neglects to mention that not all ghosts are nice or harmless, and that somewhere in the room's dark corners, the shadows sometimes stare back. Thus, seeing a ghost may do little to frighten most people, but being spun around in a vortex of appliances can easily scare the most ardent believer to forget or gloss over the event. Hence, amnesia. What frightens people most isn't that they saw a ghost, it's the realization of how vulnerable they are to an opponent they can't see, touch or escape. There is no refuge from ghosts and Spectres, and that's enough to frighten people into forgetting.

In Orpheus, the act of spending Vitality in the presence of a normal person can be dangerous. Manifesting is rarely a problem, even if the character's death marks are highly visible. The witness may be disgusted or shocked by the ghost's appearance, but she remembers the encounter. The forgetful victim syndrome occurs only if 1) the character uses a visible Horror (Helter Skelter, Witch's Nimbus when manifesting), 2) the Horror is physically destructive or detrimental, and 3) the Vitality expended in the effect exceeds the witness' Wits rating by one. Thus, someone with one dot in Wits isn't immediately spooked by zero- and one-Vitality Horror effects and can see them without panicking, while someone with 4 Wits can see most Horrors without freaking out. Consider Helter Skelter. Most people are frightened by a cup moving across a table, but they remember it. Throw in an appliance storm by expending more Vitality, and an onlooker is likely to succumb to shock and amnesia. If the effect in Vitality exceeds twice the Wits rating of a witness, that person gains a temporary Derangement from the experience. The Derangement persists for [8 minus Stamina] weeks, and the victim suffers immediate amnesia. The amnesia doesn't dissipate as the Derangement does. It endures for the remainder of the victim's life. Should someone force the victim to remember the event, the Derangement returns for [8 minus Stamina] weeks.

Using Spite to fuel effects (such as a Spectre manifesting) is an entirely different matter. Spite is an evil, angry and violent emotion. Its use impacts the human psyche like a sledgehammer, because the passion is so raw, so broken-glass jagged. Instant, visible Spite use (including manifesting) nails the human victim

with amnesia over the event, and imposes a temporary Derangement for [8 minus Stamina] months. As described above, the Derangement may fade, but the amnesia does not. Forcing the victim to remember the event brings the Derangement to the surface again for [8 minus Stamina] months. Such severe effects are a principle reason why stories about Spectre encounters rarely surface, and how Orpheus manages to keep the fact of these malevolent spirits' existence from the general public.

Repeatedly confronting a victim with amnesiainducing effects or forcing her to remember an event a number of times equal to her Wits + 1 makes the Derangement permanent. Some people develop multiple personalities to help them cope with the events in question. Naturally, this effect only harms humans and not projectors or ghosts. Likewise, for someone to suffer amnesia, the Horror's intent must be destructive or harmful. Thus, a Banshee using two Vitality in Wail to calm a child with one dot in Wits isn't going to calm the child and drive him insane. A Banshee using four Vitality to shred an opponent to bits, however, affects someone with Wits 3 or less. Spooks can therefore demonstrate their powers to allies and scientists, for example, without unsettling them to the point of imposing Derangements. Why? Because the intent isn't to harm.

Amnesia essentially boils down to the subconscious wiping of a spectral memory from an onlooker's mind. He can demonstrate the effects of such memory loss in any number of ways: occupying himself physically and mentally to the point of exhaustion, becoming withdrawn and evasive, or developing a quick temper or otherwise displaying emotional behavior. The point is, he doesn't remember the event, but knows something bad happened and he doesn't want to remember. In essence, he's haunted by something terrible that manifests only in nightmares and waking flashes. In some ways, amnesia relating to ghosts is a terrible state of denial in which the victim pushes the memories down. What goes down, however, must come up, and the victim lives a roller-coaster ride, sometimes with memories emerging through emotional outbursts that flare and subside quickly.

THE CHARACTERS

Each player assumes the role of one character, as explained in the Introduction. The process of designing that character, both with regards to her numerical game Traits and her history and goals, is described in detail in Chapter Three. The Storyteller, however, must be aware not only of each character's history, goals and game statistics, but also the role she fills in the crucible. Wrangling a group of disparate weirdoes (and their characters) is perhaps the most challenging

part of Storytelling. The basic question, then, is: Who are the characters?

MANY DEATHS, ONE LIFE

Whatever else they may or may not have in common, characters in Orpheus have all undergone multiple near-death experiences. These do not have to be classic, "tunnel-of-light" sort of events. The mere possibility of death, hammered home again and again, is enough to change a person on a fundamental and metaphysical level (which, in turn, allows them to become skimmers or sleepers, and therefore useful to the Orpheus Group). For game purposes, a "near-death" experience is any in which a person could have died but didn't and realizes that. A bullet whizzing past a man's head is just as effective a near-death experience as a bullet entering his body but missing every major organ and exiting harmlessly. Either way, the man realizes: That shot should have killed me. That thought changes him, somehow, making him better able to withstand the process of projection. Having many such experiences inures him even more.

Orpheus assumes that the characters all endured multiple near-death experiences and were trained and hired by the Orpheus Group. Some might already be ghosts, or the crucible might be composed entirely of one type or the other (projectors or ghosts).

RECRUITMENT

The Orpheus Group doesn't exactly work through recruitment firms. They might appear altruistic, but any "good work" they accomplish is ancillary to reaping some profit (their first priority) and advancing understanding of the afterlife (their second). How they found the characters is an important part of each character's back-story. Orpheus monitors online discussion groups and those chats themed toward ghosts and the supernatural, looking for certain stories and common encounters indicating a potential recruit. Some projectors are recruited because of a life-threatening illness, others because they performed a dangerous job long enough that they are spiritually able to project — all they lack is training. Orpheus agents who undergo drawn-out or dangerous missions are sometimes sent to monitor veteran associations or support groups for the terminally ill. The organization asks all agents to watch the media for reports of disasters with only a few survivors, and maintains contacts in the military and law enforcement the world over.

What can Orpheus offer potential recruits? The most obvious (and often most effective) answer is... money. People who perform highly dangerous tasks aren't always very well compensated (police officers aren't exactly overpaid, for example). Likewise, critical illness is highly

expensive and the words "complete medical coverage" can be very enticing. Occasionally, Orpheus brings in potential agents with the promise of learning secrets or contacting the deceased. On the whole, though, the company is leery of using this approach. Monetary motivation is easy to control and understand, though it doesn't inspire tremendous creativity or drive on the part of the employees. Agents who accept the job for personal reasons, however, are more prone to burnout or to abandoning their jobs for ethical reasons (which, while perhaps admirable, doesn't thrill Orpheus much).

If Orpheus finds a potential recruit, they often attempt sounding her out for belief in the supernatural and life after death. The first step is usually to see if the subject attends religious services regularly or has any strong spiritual or religious devotion. Along the way, Orpheus collects as much mundane data on the subject as possible: Family, occupation, job history, education, special skills, close friends, etc. In many ways, this resembles the background checks performed on potential government agents (which should come as no surprise). Of course, Orpheus, while well-funded and efficient, doesn't have the same equipment or authority as the government, and a perceptive potential recruit might very well notice that someone is interested in her life.

Orpheus Group is not limited to mundane methods of investigation, of course. A particularly promising recruit might merit special attention, meaning the organization sends a skimmer or sleeper to watch the subject in her "off-hours." Any record of these investigations is normally destroyed once Orpheus reaches a final decision on whether or not to approach the subject (all projectors know this kind of surveillance happens, but no one wants to think it happened to *them*).

If Orpheus deems a subject of suitable temperament and skill, they send a representative to speak with her. Ordinarily, this takes place in the form of a phone call from a "recruiter;" if the subject does not work in a field where such contact is plausible, Orpheus simply contacts her about a study involving near-death experiences. In either case, Orpheus tells the recruit that they conduct paranormal research and "active investigation" (at this point in the interview, Orpheus mentions several movie titles — *Ghostbusters* is still the most popular, although *Sixth Sense* is gaining) and asks if she would consider a career change.

Inevitably, the subject asks more questions than the researcher can comfortably answer. Sometimes, the representative brings a skimmer along for "proof" of what Orpheus agents are trained to do; if not, the rep must simply do the best he can to convince the subject. The word "ghost" usually isn't mentioned, at least not in terms of becoming one (which would understandably unnerve most subject). Instead, agents

use phrases like "extrasomatic projection," "post-life entities" and "advanced meditative techniques" to entice potential recruits.

Once a recruit agrees (which, of course, doesn't usually happen during the initial meeting), Orpheus discusses salary. Ordinarily, Orpheus promises recruits the base salary initially, which is comfortable enough. Once the recruit completes the psychological and vocational tests, Orpheus has a better sense of her qualifications and therefore, how much she is actually worth to the company. In general, intel work pays the lowest while fumigation and removal pays the best (see Missions, below). The base salary for any projector in service to Orpheus, however, is 60,000 USD annually, plus benefits. Those continuously involved in hazard-pay situations (like eliminating Spectres or assassinating people), may earn an additional \$10,000 to \$15,000 a year, though there are few agents who can pursue this type of existence without suffering mentally or physically in the long-run. The insurance packages they offer are particularly impressive (and astute agents see this, quite rightly, as cause for worry).

Of course, working for Orpheus has its sticking points. For one thing, while Orpheus is a commercial organization and, therefore, doesn't mind a certain amount of advertising by word of mouth, they do frown on agents being vocal about their operations — even to their own families. Indeed, people with large or particularly tight-knit families are often passed over for membership; complete honesty between family is commendable, but not something Orpheus wants to chance. Likewise, although Orpheus is arguably the best in its field, it does have competitors who would happily recruit — or simply pump for information — any Orpheus agents they find. Orpheus insists on secrecy largely for the agents' own protection, and agents who breach secrecy are summarily fired and warned to keep quiet.

BASIC TRAINING

The Storyteller can start the chronicle at whatever point in the character's training that she desires. For example, beginning the game as the characters are just finishing their initial training allows the Storyteller to pair characters up as roommates, or even stipulate that the characters all share a dormitory (or at least a floor; Orpheus segregates members by gender). If the characters live together at a facility, even if just for the first story, play up their interactions together. Ask the players to consider what their characters think about living with these other folks. What if one of the characters is a true slob who doesn't think twice about tossing his clothing wherever it may land? Fistfights have broken out over less, after all, and these characters must trust each other with their lives and souls in the field. What about an outspoken atheist character paired with a devout Christian or Muslim? Amusingly, either character could use his job at Orpheus as evidence for his own personal convictions (as is so often the way of faith).

This approach allows the Storyteller to relate a story with a kind of "boot camp" feel — Orpheus training the characters to work with (and against) ghosts. As horrific and otherworldly as this might seem, remember that each character had multiple brushes with death. Humans laugh at death as a means of coping with it; we belittle it to lessen its impact. How might trainees at Orpheus cope with their supernatural jobs? Agents might compete with one another based on inserting oneself into a blip's routine or on earning a living person's notice in the subtlest way possible. Of course, not everyone handles the training well. What if the characters notice that another agent, one who has heretofore handled the training superbly, is cracking (manifesting Stains, becoming jittery, etc.)? Will they approach their employers or try to handle the problem themselves?

If the characters have already completed their training, however, and live at home, the Storyteller faces new possibilities. Naturally, the most obvious is that characters must either breach company policy and tell their families the true nature of their occupations, or lie to their loves ones about extended absences and the nightmares from which they likely suffer. This kind of "double life" can only continue for so long; eventually, the work may follow the characters home. A character's house might actually become haunted (perhaps even by another character, if any of them are ghosts). What if a skimmer's daughter starts seeing ghosts? Parents ordinarily comfort their children by assuring them ghosts aren't real (or by making ill-conceived references to angels), but how can an Orpheus employee actually say those things? And, what happens when the perceptive child sees right through her father's lies? Does the character project alone to investigate the haunting, or try to obtain company approval to investigate the matter with his crucible? And what if the company is actually behind it?

The character's everyday life, whether at the Orpheus facility or at home, should never occupy too much time during a game session. Snapshots of mundane life might be good for atmosphere or as setup to a life-shaking event, but focusing on such for too long is boring for the other players and doesn't really advance the story. While it's important the Storyteller be aware of what's happening in the characters' everyday lives, and how those details might best fit in the chronicle, such events and minutia are best relegated to backstory or written accounts by the players (and perhaps even worth an extra experience point or two).

THE TEAM ASSEMBLED

The first mission on which the characters embark might be their first actual job together, a training "simu-

lation," or even an encounter outside the confines of Orpheus (if some of the characters are hues, for example). Whatever the exact details of this mission, the Storyteller should pay attention to several factors:

First, how do the characters interact? Do any of them have skills or Horrors that seem repetitive or useless? Do any of the concepts need rethinking? If so, the end of the first story is the time to shuffle Traits and make the necessary changes to the characters' backstories. Conflict within the crucible is good, but only as long as the characters can still interact; they shouldn't be actively at each other's throats.

Second, was the story's goal accomplished? Consider the opening scenes of nearly any film; they serve to introduce the characters and the setting and show what matters are like under normal circumstances. In telling ghost stories, this usually involves flashes of the unseen ghost, some minor hauntings, etc. In an **Orpheus** story, the opening session should involve the characters on a mission or in training, allowing them to accomplish a mission that won't decide the world's fate. Use this time to introduce important supporting characters, recurring themes, etc., but don't take all the players' hard work in designing their characters and destroy it right off the bat (while this kind of immediate shake-up can be an effective motivator, you do it at your own risk; many players would rather ease into such events).

Finally, ask players for feedback after the story is over. Find out what facets of **Orpheus** they especially enjoy and which ones they find lukewarm, and more importantly, why. A troupe looking for an X-Files feel to the chronicle might be disappointed if you had something more like Thirteen Ghosts in mind, but perhaps there's some middle ground. When they say "X-Files," what are they really looking for? Detective stories? Conspiracies? Unrequited love? Government involvement? Find out what's really important to your players and work those ideas into the chronicle (it's actually ideal to do this before the first story, and then follow up afterwards, but better late than never).

OTHER OPTIONS

While the assumption is that players will create characters who work for Orpheus, that's not the only option. It's advantageous in that it gives you a superb framework in which to set your chronicle, but for a more experienced Storyteller (or troupe that just can't do anything the easy way), this might not be the best choice. Below are several choices for alternate preludes and origins for characters.

• Terrel & Squib Pharmaceuticals: Orpheus' largest competitor, T&S has a different attitude toward spooks. Orpheus isn't altruistic, at least privately, but

they don't treat ghosts as tools or slaves. T&S is entirely amoral, and uses spirits and hues for whatever ends the company can conceive. T&S also doesn't pay significant attention to safety or intelligence; they'll employ a large team and send them in blind. This means that if the characters work for T&S, they'll receive the latest in technology and they'll be almost constantly on missions — but they'll earn very little in the way of a briefing. The standard is something like: "A possible haunting. Capture the entities for interrogation. Requisition any special equipment. Report back when finished." If the agents die in the process (which happens all too frequently), T&S always follows up and makes certain that if the agents are now ghosts, they still work for Terrel and Squib.

- NextWorld: NextWorld chronicles might appeal to players who enjoy playing modern combatants. The organization generally recruits people who have seen actual combat, whether in military service or simply in everyday life in a dangerous area of the world. NextWorld places more emphasis on intel than T&S, but doesn't travel the same lengths as Orpheus. Most missions they undertake are of the fumigation or removal variety, though they do engage in extensive wetworks as well. Given the high degree of military experience in the organization, NextWorld may also have unofficial access to government technology that not even Terrel & Squib has seen.
- All ghosts: It's entirely possible to run a chronicle in which all characters are spirits or hues, and avoid any contact with any of the organizations dealing with ghosts. Even assuming all the characters are ghosts, there's still room for diversity of origin; characters might have been "saved" by an Orpheus crucible, they could be members of Orpheus (or T&S, or NextWorld) who died and went rogue, or maybe they're just folks who perished and, for whatever reason, have enough Vitality to become self-aware. The danger here is that such chronicles don't have an overarching reason for a crucible to be together, but that just means the players and Storyteller need to work together to create one. Maybe the characters all died in the same accident, or were all saved by the same Orpheus crucible and act as their liaisons and contacts among the dead. In any case, one important constant is that no ghost has been dead for more than three years (this mystery will be explained in future supplements). Such characters have different choices of Backgrounds than projectors, of course (see Chapter Three), but also face much different challenges. When you're already dead, there's no easy way to escape from Spectres. Likewise, rising levels of Spite affect such characters very differently. For more information on the different Laments, refer to Chapter Two (pp. 94-97).



THE GHOST STORY

After the recruitment and training comes the first mission. Orpheus normally pursues some very specific mission objectives, and other organizations might accept similar jobs (NextWorld, for example, is even less squeamish about completing distasteful tasks than Orpheus). Below is the chronology of a typical Orpheus mission. The troupe's crucible can become involved at any step in the proceedings; perhaps the person conducting intelligence work was called away at the last moment to take on a more important task and the characters must pick up where he left off (meaning they must access any information he's collected, but it won't necessarily be organized). Likewise, if an entire crucible disappears in pursuit of a target, Orpheus recognizes it might still be possible to salvage the members (and thus, confirming the missing agents' status — dead [ghosts], dead [inactive] or alive — becomes the first task).

Note: This structure might seem formulaic. That it is, and for good reason. Again, we're trying to provide the Storyteller with a solid framework. Once that's in place, you may feel free to deviate from it as much as possible. Orpheus Group, however, finds that certain methods work well, and therefore uses these methods across the board. Consider this chronology of events the "norm" — if the players know how things normally go, they can appreciate the gravity of a wrench in the works at any point along the way.

INTELLIGENCE

Orpheus is a for-profit company, which means they don't go chasing every supernatural lead just because they can (though they certainly monitor any such leads, just in case a job should come of it). The company's work begins when a client approaches Orpheus with a request. This might be someone recently bereaved wishing to contact their lost loved one (whether for closure or more financial reasons, such as missing money or a clarification on a will), a victim of a suspected haunting or someone who simply wants proof of life after death (Orpheus typically milks these latter folks for all they can and arranges for a projector with skill in manifesting to the living to appear and scare the hell out of the client). Orpheus also receives requests for more shady dealings. Corporate espionage is one possibility, as are vengeful divorcees hoping to drive former spouses mad — what better way than a haunting? Likewise, powerful criminals sometimes run afoul of ghosts, and will pay extra for Orpheus agents to ignore any illegal activity they may witness while contending with the ghost. Orpheus tests for this kind of operation during the hiring stage; an agent who they feel can handle breaking various legal and ethical standards to accomplish the job might be assigned such tasks (and receive compensation commensurately for time and trouble). Once Orpheus ascertains the client's needs (and the initial check clears), the organization starts working.

Before diving into the meat of the mission, however, Orpheus needs to know what they're up against. As a habit, the organization doesn't send a team into a situation with inadequate information (though they have sent in teams equipped with *incorrect* information, but that's not deliberate). The first step in a mission is information gathering. Usually, Orpheus conducts such investigation with entirely mundane tools — internet searches, media stories, interviews, surveillance, etc. If the characters' crucible is equipped for this kind of thing (and, more importantly, if the players would enjoy it) they may even conduct the intel work, but the usual assumption is that an Orpheus detective collects the data before turning it over to the company, which then assembles a file and gives it to the crucible.

The process of information-gathering might be a mission unto itself. In the case of corporate espionage, the crucible may have to watch company executives and obtain blackmail material. Likewise, the government sometimes uses Orpheus in counter-terrorism activities, though this is strictly under the table (the government will not publicly support or lend credence to Orpheus' claims). In these cases, collecting details is of paramount importance. Orpheus employs scientists who can analyze data, but that means the data must be accurate. Since taking pictures while projecting is impossible, such missions either involve projectors with superb memories or projectors who can bypass security systems and allow agents with bodies to move in and collect the information.

Sometimes, Orpheus sponsors fact-finding expeditions itself. If a new breed of Spectre appears, for example, Orpheus often assembles a team to learn all about it: Numbers, habits, capabilities, etc. On information-gathering missions, no matter who sponsors them, the stated objective is simply to accrue data. The crucible isn't usually given enough background information to act, and might wind up botching matters horribly even if they take what seems like warranted action.

MISSIONS

Orpheus is careful to spell out a particular mission's goals. If a couple wants their new mansion free of ghosts, Orpheus simply tells the agents to find and eliminate the spirits. The crucible might decide to help the ghosts move on, destroy them or simply talk to them and persuade them to leave the mansion (or at least not actively haunt it). Orpheus doesn't much care which route the crucible takes, but does urge agents to use the most efficient (read: quickest) and profitable means available.

The most common types of missions are described immediately following. Please note that a given mission might incorporate facets of more than one type; a task might be labeled "Removal/Fumigation" meaning it could go either way, depending on the crucible's discovery.

INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

As mentioned previously, sometimes the mission itself is intelligence gathering. A jealous wife wants her husband followed or Orpheus needs someone to pull a Crocodile Hunter and study the habits of a group of Spectres from afar. All these missions, however, often occur with the caveat that the agents are to avoid detection and confrontation. If a situation appears to be devolving into potential violence, agents must contact the assignment's Lead Investigator for further details.

RETRIEVAL

Orpheus sends the crucible to find and retrieve something of value. Many such missions depend on intel work; once the intelligence-gathering agents hit a dead end, all available data is passed on to the crucible and the agents must put the pieces together. Ordinarily, this happens when anyone who might further the investigation is dead — the crucible must find a ghost who can give the characters a hint and then coax the information out of him. If the ghost in question is a blip, the mission becomes complicated. A crucible member must insinuate himself into the blip's routine enough to ask questions, or the crucible must "save" the ghost and raise his Vitality to the point he becomes aware of his situation (see Saving Ghosts, below). Retrieving enough information to attain the investigation's parameters can take an entire story, and might see agents running back and forth doing favors for various ghosts until they achieve what they need (of course, blackmail and torture are also effective means of persuasion).

After the characters uncover the object's, person's or data's whereabouts, they must acquire it. This can necessitate thievery, purchasing or simply calling the location to the client's attention. Once this is done, the mission is over.

Retrieval missions are excellent ways to establish contact with other ghosts, and can have a very *Indiana Jones*-like feel; a client might want a mystic artifact found. Suppose it lies buried in a tomb, booby-trapped or isolated to the point that only a ghost can find it?

REMOVAL

This sort of mission usually carries a monetary bonus (unfortunately in the form of hazard pay). Removal missions involve finding a specific target, whether living or a ghost, and removing them from an area. Missions classified as "Removal," however, carry with them the assumption that the target will survive the process (as-

sassinations are a different kind of mission altogether; see Fumigation).

Removal missions happen for a variety of reasons, many of them personal and even petty. A rich landowner might want "undesirables" (whatever that means to him) scared out of his neighborhood, or a father might want his daughter's beau driven away. If the target is a ghost, the reason is usually a simple haunting, though since removal missions carry with them an implicit "do no lasting harm" policy, Orpheus usually knows who the ghost was in life and, therefore, can provide some suggestions on how best to drive him away.

When designing removal missions, the Storyteller should pay as much, or more, attention to the location as to the target. What's so special about the location that someone would pay Orpheus' exorbitant fees to drive off an interloper? Is there more going on than the client is telling Orpheus, and if so, are the characters within their rights to take action if they find something truly unpleasant happening? Perhaps the clients built a home or business over a burial ground or something similar, and the spirits have more rights to be there than the clients. Does the crucible see it that way, or are they in it for the money?

When designing the target, ascribe motivation. Ghosts rarely haunt locales for the sheer thrill of it (and those who do, generally fold quickly when someone like Orpheus agents appear). Give the target a compelling reason to be there against the client's wishes, and be sure he/she/it is capable of giving the crucible a good fight. This doesn't necessarily mean making the adversary a combat monster, but perhaps the target knows the lay of the land far better than the crucible and can dodge and outrun them. Perhaps a living target can sense ghosts and even ward them off somehow. Also, consider whether the target will listen to reason, or if the crucible must drive it off forcibly. If the characters plan to scare a living target away, they should ensure he won't run to the tabloids with ghost stories. Otherwise, the crucible might be in the uncomfortable position of fending off reality TV show crews and paparazzi in addition to their actual target.

FUMIGATION

A fumigation mission occurs when a client hires Orpheus to clear out a Spectre, group of Spectres or any hostile ghosts period. Unlike a removal, fumigation does not require the targets receive humane treatment — the agents are meant to clean house by the surest and most efficient means necessary.

Intelligence work, especially from projectors, is critical in fumigation assignments. Orpheus agents trade horror stories about walking into fumigation jobs that should have been cakewalks and getting ambushed by hordes of Spectres. Before sending a

team in, Orpheus likes having a relatively clear idea of what situation they're about to encounter. The trouble is, one wrong assumption during the intelligence gathering process can skew the whole operation, and it's the agents who wind up paying the price. Any fumigation mission with a high risk factor necessitates "baby-sitters" for projector's bodies (which adds to the expense of the proposition). The good news, of course, is that fumigation pays extra.

WETWORK

Officially, only ghosts are made targets of elimination missions. Orpheus, however, is occasionally willing to take on less-than-legal operations, if the money's right and they know the client through back avenues (what that might entail is up to the Storyteller). This requires agents of a certain caliber (read: willing to commit murder) and a pretty specific set of circumstances. Orpheus accepts assassination contracts, but filters those contracts through a long process of forms and intermediaries, so the money from an assassination spends significant time in dummy accounts. This prevents the authorities from ever noticing a quick boost to the Orpheus Group's bottom line following a suspicious death. Also, Orpheus usually makes the deaths appear accidental. The Wisp Shade is superb at arranging this; the Unearthly Repose Horror allows Wisps to lead targets into traffic, off cliffs or into other potential hazards. All Shades have their own methods of killing — the trick is convincing the agents wielding the Horror to abandon morality for a few moments. The initial exams during training provide Orpheus with a good indication of who might take part in of wetworks, but if no one who fits the proverbial bill is available Orpheus uses other methods of persuasion. They may appeal to an agent's sensibilities; if an agent lost a loved one to a drug overdose, it's not so hard convincing him to kill a dealer. They might make the job personal by telling the agent that the mark was responsible for an agent's death (this can be especially effective for ghosts). Or, at worst (and rarely), Orpheus might simply blackmail their agents into wetwork, particularly sleepers, who need the organization's help to return to life. Of course, the agent won't be so loyal after such a mission, but if the money's right, Orpheus feels it can stand to lose an agent in the process (and by lose, Orpheus means terminate).

ESPIONAGE

Espionage jobs usually fall into one of two categories, internal and external. External is much more common (and usually more pedestrian), and doesn't pay as well. Internal is lucrative, glamorous and extremely dangerous.

External espionage is the term used when a client hires Orpheus to spy. Most often this is corporate or

industrial espionage, which is a kind of intelligence mission (see Intelligence, p. XX). The agents find whatever they need to find and report back, making sure they aren't seen or tracked. Sometimes, they may even steal the target technology or documentation, possessing a target to carry the material out (incidentally, frame-jobs are entirely within this type of mission's mandate) or manifesting long enough to do the deed themselves.

Internal espionage, however, is sponsored directly by Orpheus Group. Orpheus places these agents as "moles" in other organizations, including T&S and NextWorld. This requires they have the skills necessary to be hired by said companies (much easier for T&S, but advancing in the organization is also more difficult). Only skimmers (and occasionally ghosts) undertake this kind of work since sleepers are entirely at the mercy of the target and because other organizations don't have access to the chemical formulas that Orpheus perfected, which means sleepers would be at much greater risk on such missions.

Sometimes, espionage missions of both types adopt a more active tone, with Orpheus asking agents to sabotage instead of merely observe. Many Horrors, properly applied, can wreak havoc on a company's resources, making Orpheus a good choice for businesses who aren't satisfied with only knowing their competitors' plans. This is unethical, of course, and highly illegal, but it's hardly a matter of life and death (normally, anyway), so Orpheus has a larger body of agents willing to undertake such assignments.

Sabotaging NextWorld or T&S, of course, is a different matter. Many of the same Horrors can be brought to bear, but both organizations know what to look for. Likewise, Terrel & Squib has a much greater number of ghosts in its "employ" than Orpheus or NextWorld, and that means the characters must cover any active espionage activity with greater diligence. NextWorld doesn't have the same intelligence capabilities, but they are likelier to respond violently.

Finally, Orpheus might assign agents to counterespionage. If Orpheus suspects an agent of spying for another company, Orpheus would rather back her into a corner and force her to reveal her allegiance (and any other information they can scare from her) than simply drive her off or eliminate her. Agents with a delicate touch are necessary for such missions.

SALVATION

Very rarely, Orpheus assigns a team with helping a ghost pass on by resolving whatever tethers the soul to Earth. Usually, this is a means to an end rather than an end in itself, but occasionally, a client pays Orpheus to give a ghost peace. Since Orpheus knows it's possible (but difficult), they happily charge top dollar for this kind of work. Saving ghosts is discussed in detail below.

PIGMENT

Pigment or "black heroin" is a popular street drug, and if any character puts two and two together, she'll realize it has something to do with ghosts. The characters might well request Orpheus devote some resources toward tracking the drug's sources and stopping it. The problem, though, is that Orpheus has more pressing (and profitable) matters on its plate. A persuasive group of characters, however, might well get a mission approved — or simply pursue the matter on their own time.

What they'll discover about pigment is, at this point, up to the Storyteller. Future **Orpheus** books will detail the true nature of pigment and its distributors, however, so you'll probably want to keep matters hidden, at least initially. Maybe the characters bust a local dealer, but even he knows only the guy directly above him on the drug food chain. Sooner or later, Orpheus will grow tired of funding this project (especially if they aren't making money) and assign the crucible something else. If the characters are on their own, you can keep them involved in the drug trade as long as you like; there are plenty of other stories to be told in that kind of milieu without revealing the truth behind pigment (before you actually know it, at least).

SAVING GHOSTS

Most blip and drone-class ghosts have no idea they have died. They remember snippets of their lives, and act out those tiny scenes with only a nagging feeling that something has changed. They see the living, but ignore ghosts — unless those spooks have high enough Vitality ratings that they appear alive. Projectors and ghost characters are vital enough that blips and other "trapped" ghosts can perceive them, and these characters can even break the ghosts' routine enough to uncover some information about what tethers them to the living world. Stories involving "saving" ghosts can be very satisfying for both the players and the characters; they allow the crucible to be the "good guys," with very little ambiguity (unless the ghost needs to see someone die to move on, but more on that later). The tangible rewards for this kind of effort reflect this; a crucible that helps a ghost resolve its tethers can look forward to a new ally, or at the very least, a boost in Vitality and perhaps a reduction in Spite.

STORYTELLER CONCERNS

When designing and running "salvation" stories, the Storyteller should keep a few things in mind. First, every ghost is unique, and the details are what will make the players (and characters) care. Tug at heartstrings, but be gentler than Hollywood's trite efforts. If a character entered Orpheus hoping to find her dead father in the afterlife, perhaps a ghost might be searching for his daughter to tell her he loves her. A character who wants revenge against an ex-lover might be very eager to help the ghost of someone murdered by a cheating spouse. Use the characters' histories and Natures to flesh out the ghosts they may encounter.

Second, remember that Orpheus is not a theological or philanthropic organization. They aren't concerned with seeing a ghost pass on unless there's money in it. That means if it's quicker to destroy an angry ghost than to find the man who killed him and bring him to justice, Orpheus would rather see the ghost destroyed. Of course, Orpheus trusts individual crucibles to make appropriate decisions on such matters, but Orpheus often reminds them about the bottom line. That said, Orpheus does sometimes label missions as "Salvation" (as mentioned above) and ask the crucible to help the weary soul lay down its burdens and pass on.

Finally, ghosts on the cusp of realizing they are dead are extremely vulnerable to Spectres. Orpheus warns its agents that "freeing" ghosts attracts Spectres, but this isn't really true. It's just that Spectres notice them more easily in the panicked moments after being freed. Fortunately, projectors and ghosts both receive a boost in Vitality when a ghost becomes untethered, so they are at least better equipped to fight.

STEPS TO FREEING GHOSTS

Information is obviously the first step. The characters must know who the ghost is (or was) and what unfinished business the person may have left behind. The more dangerous the tether, of course, the more easily the crucible can uncover it (for whatever consolation that might provide). Watching the ghost's routine usually provides some clue as to identity, but not always to tethers. In many ways, a blip is a ghost in denial, and it typically ignores the issues forcing it to linger as a restless shade. For example, a man who died in a car accident soon after discovering his wife's infidelity might haunt the wreck of his car, endlessly driving, fiddling with the radio, forever thinking himself on the highway moments before his fatal crash. He will never mention the event that drove him to drive that day — unless the characters can piece it together or snap him out of his reverie. To do this, the crucible must learn about the ghost. The more details they discover (and therefore that you, as Storyteller, can provide), the more "ammunition" the characters have in breaking the ghost out of his routine. Likes, dislikes, important events, friends' names, favorite foods or even common phrases may help.

Naturally, the biggest advantages characters have in discerning a ghost's identity are through their Default Abilities (see p. 82, 148-151). The power to sense and track a ghost's tethers allows the crucible to at least have a sense of where to start, but after that, they must rely on guesswork and detective skills. Once they've determined what a ghost's tether is and why, one of the characters may try resolving that issue before using Sever the Strand to "untether" the ghost. If this liberates all of the ghost's tethers, he ascends in a nimbus of light or falls into a pit of darkness (depending on the Storyteller's take on the state of the ghost's soul). Of course, the crucible might simply resolve all the ghost's tethers but one, allowing the ghost to retain a sense of self and remain behind as an ally. Drones, however, typically have only one or two tethers. More powerful (and therefore dangerous) ghosts make better allies — provided the crucible can unravel their mysteries.

RANDOMGHOST GENERATION

The following five tables allow the Storyteller to randomly generate tethers for a ghost character. Before rolling on these tables, however, the Storyteller should consider how long resolving the ghost's tethers should take.

If the characters are meant to resolve the ghost's tethers in one session (either as a one-shot game or as a minor facet to a larger story), roll once on the Moderate table *or* twice on the Simple table.

If the tethers require two to three sessions to resolve, but are not the entire focus of a story (being a side plot or peripheral matter to the main plot), roll once on the Difficult table *or* once on the Moderate table and twice on the Simple table.

If you plan on the resolution being the crucible's main focus for an entire story, roll once on the Dangerous table and once on the Moderate table (or twice on the Simple table), *or* twice on the Difficult table, once on the Moderate table and three times on the Simple table.

If the ghost is meant to preoccupy the characters for multiple stories, becoming a major event for the chronicle, roll twice on the Dangerous table, three times on the Difficult table, four times on the Moderate table and five times on the Simple table. Such ghosts are complex and should be both highly detailed and highly important to the characters.

Once you determine how many tethers the ghost has, roll two dice and add the numbers together (thus producing a number from two to 20) and consult the appropriate table. Repeat as many times as necessary.

When interpreting the tether tables, remember these are only suggestions. The table may say, "Tell my wife I love her," but you can easily change this to "husband,"

"lover" or "brother," depending on the needs of the story. Likewise, the difficulty of these tethers is largely circumstantial; "destroy all copies of an incriminating video" is listed as Difficult, but if there's only one copy and the characters can easily locate it, the Storyteller can justifiably consider this Simple.

On the tables, the tethers are written in first person simply because it saves space. Understand, however, that many ghosts don't realize how much time has passed since their deaths (since they don't know they're dead) and so may not know that a certain tether is important to them. This provides extra work for the characters, since they must decipher from the ghost's words and actions what she might want (Sense Nature Group and other Nature-related Default Abilities should come in handy here).

The Dangerous table is a special case. The tethers listed there are often similar to those found on the Difficult table, the difference often being an element of the supernatural. For example, finding a ghost's killer is a Difficult task if the killer is human, but Dangerous if the killer is another ghost.

FUTURE SIGHTS

So what does the future of **Orpheus** have in store? That's difficult to say without spoiling upcoming secrets. Still, rather than leaving the Storyteller in a lurch when a character uses Forebode to divine the future, here are some example visions you can use based on forthcoming developments. Please bear in mind, however, that most of these visions are figurative or symbolic, not literal. And because these deal with potential upcoming events, the Storyteller can safely place them at least a month in the future, if not more. He need not be specific with the actual dates of these moments since they rely, not so much on **Orpheus**' release schedule, but on when the Storyteller chooses to bring them into play.

- Home: You come home on a night when the clouds are thick and bruised, and the sky explodes in bursts of flash and thunder. The house is empty, however. Blood streaks paint the corridors and floors with a garish flourish. You run to the baby's room, her cries still ringing the air, but upon entering, everything snaps to silence. The baby's cradle is empty and stained with blood. Suddenly, someone bursts through the door, the lit flashlight in his hand rudely blinding you and throwing back the darkness. You hear the cop yell "Freeze!"
- The Puppets: Dozens of puppets dance and move around each other, but their strings twist, knot and entangle upon one another with each passing moment. Soon, the puppets jerk and lose their grace, their strings tangled in a

SIMP	LE TETHERS	DIFF	ICULT TABLE
Dice Rol	ll Tether	Dice Roll	Tether
2	Tell my wife I love her	2	Provide for my ailing mother
3	Discover my baby's name	3	Have a particular person arrested and
4	Put flowers on a particular grave (the ghost's		convicted
	or someone else's)	4	Find my father's ghost and bring him to
5	Play my special song in my apartment		me
6	Buy a copy of the book I wrote	5 6	Finish my novel/painting/sculpture/etc.
7	Show me my obituary	7	Find the person who killed me Make my son quit smoking
8 9	Obtain my ring from a pawn shop Tear up a certain photograph	8	Find my missing body
10	Take down my web site	9	Have my death declared a murder (rather
11	Clear out my desk at work		than a suicide or accident)
12	Scare the school bully	10	Destroy all copies of an incriminating
13	Find out if anyone else died in the event		video
	that killed me	11	Make sure my son is named after me
14	Burn my day planner	12	Make sure a certain celebrity reads my
15	Unlock the doors to my house	12	fan letter
16	Show me my test results (GRE, pregnancy,	13 14	Get my rival at work fired Bring my childhood sweetheart to my
15.00	medical, etc.)	14	grave site
17-20	Roll on the Moderate or Difficult table, but	15	Prevent a gala event from occurring
	reduce the difficulty of the task to Simple.	16	Make sure the new owners of my house
<u>₩00</u>	ERATE TABLE		leave the attic untouched
Dice Rol		17-20	Roll on the Simple or Moderate table
2	Take me to my own grave site		and raise the difficulty of the tether to
3	Obtain papers from my safety deposit box		Difficult.
4	Restore my car		GEROUS TABLE
5 6	Ask my family for forgiveness	Die Roll	Tether
7	Play my original song at an open mic event Force my husband to confess his infidelity	Note: Ro	ll only one die for this table.
8	Help my kid's Little League team win their	1	Find my killer (a supernatural being like
	next game		another projector)
9	Exhume my body and have a religious	2	Kill the man who raped/killed me Find a specific ghost (who is now a
	service performed	3	Spectre)
10	Rescue my dog from the pound	4	Free my dead friend from Terrel and
11	Bring me a souvenir from Europe		Squib
12	Take my children to Cedar Point for a day	5	Retrieve my body (stashed in a Spectre
13	Donate money to my favorite charity		haunt)
14		6	Destroy a particular shipment of drugs
15	Make a co-worker return money he embezzled	7	Burn down the place where I died
16	Inscribe my name somewhere in the build-	8	Make sure a particular crime boss falls
	ing where I died	9	from power Drive "undesirables" from my paidbhar
17-20	Roll on the Simple or Difficult table and	9	Drive "undesirables" from my neighborhood/building
	adjust the difficult to Moderate.	10	Catch me and force me to confront my
			action

growing ball. Soon, some simply hang, limp and forgotten because their strings are so knotted. Soon, they all hang so.

- Subway Ride: You're riding the subway, the walls streaming past, everybody minding their business. Suddenly, the subway train moves through a spider strand of gauze that passes through the car. Nobody else can see it, but you can. Then another strand hurtles by, catching you and pinning your arm to the wall. Then three more strands... then a dozen pass through the subway car, pinning you to the wall further. Outside, you can see webs covering everything, and you're suffocating beneath each sticky layer, struggling and calling forth the spider all the quicker.
- The Silent Before: The street is alive with sound and life. People walk to work or enjoy their meals on restaurant terraces. Suddenly, everyone blurs to a halt, frozen in mid-motion. Only you can move...and the animals. Dogs, birds, cats... all look around briefly, then scatter in panic. The air behind you moans, but before you can turn around, something strikes you to ground.
- The Breath: The snarls come from behind you, but no matter where you turn, they remain hidden. Soon, you

feel something exhaling hard on the back of your neck like a winded horse. You feel its damp breath condense into moisture on the nape of your neck, but when you try to wipe it away, your hand is covered in blood and flies.

• The Hand: A pool lies before you, all oil and sludge. You see a black man, his features blurred, walk toward the pool's edge and look back at you. "Wait for me here," he says, then walks into the pool. A minute passes, followed by an hour... or was it a day? The surface breaks and a hand reaches out from it, reaching for you. It's skeletal and desiccated, and the oil glistens on its skin. What do you do?

DANGERS

Orpheus pays very well, both in terms of salary and benefits, but it does ask some fairly daunting tasks of its agents. These dangers begin as jokes in Orpheus training (monsters and ghosts seem fairly unbelievable, even to those who have seen something of death), but rapidly become reasons for a crucible to stick together and for the members to trust one another once the agents take to the field.

BODY SNATCHING

Spectres can occasionally jump into "vacant bodies" and possess them just as Skinriders can. The power and ferocity of a Spectre in a living body, however, is nothing short of a recipe for destruction; there's a reason why such embodied Spectres are called Jasons. Fortunately, few Spectres are powerful enough to attempt it, and the only bodies they seem readily capable of possessing are living vessels whose souls are elsewhere (that is, projectors). Even then, this horrific event only happens under certain circumstances.

Skimmers who become completely corrupted by Spite (that is, their Spite rating rises to 10) do not immediately become Spectres. What happens, however, is almost worse. The cord between the skimmer's body and soul snaps instantly, killing the skimmer (who promptly becomes a ghost). The Spite the skimmer carried, however, shunts off to the body. The character's Spite rating falls to whatever it would normally be for a ghost of the same Shade and Nature plus one. For example, if a Haunter character with the Rebel Nature becomes a ghost in this manner, 7 of the Spite rating are shunted off into his body (becoming food for the Spectre that mysteriously — but invariably — inhabits it at this stage of the process) and he retains four Spite (the remaining 3 from his starting Spite + 1 because of

his death). The more Spite rating that winds up in the body, the stronger and more focused the inhabiting Spectre becomes.

Beyond any concern about Spite, skimmers must also be careful that Spectres do not find their bodies when they're projecting. If a Spectre possesses the capability, it may attempt to assume control of the body directly. A Spectre that does this is usually unfocused and simply wanders about attacking people at random (for all the consolation this may prove to the evicted skimmer).

Sleepers who gain a 10 Spite rating become Spectres as usual; the flesh simply dies. Members of this Lament, however, may also shunt Spite points into their comatose bodies and heal it after someone revives them (see p. 227-237). Sleepers retain no link with their vessels, so Spectres can't possess said flesh directly. If, however, the body dies because of Spite damage, the sudden influx of Spite may call out to a nearby Spectre, who then possesses it. Unlike possessed skimmers, these Jasons do not resemble the living (since the bodies they possess are not truly alive) and can do little except wreak havoc until someone destroys them. In any event, the now-dead sleeper (who becomes a ghost) gains a Spite rating for allowing his body to die, and so begins as a ghost with his normal starting Spite rating + 1.

Below are some of the more common perils a crucible might face while on a mission, and some suggestions for how best to handle them as Storyteller. Game statistics and information for these beings are provided in this chapter.

SPECTRES

Orpheus has several theories as to the true nature of Spectres. The organization is aware that spooks can become Spectres, and that when this happens, the gross physical alterations that many ghosts and projected entities exhibit (called Stains) become exaggerated and predominant. What they don't know is why the change seems irreversible (i.e., no matter how many tethers are resolved, it doesn't seem possible to turn a Spectre back into a normal spook) and why all traces of humanity seemingly disappear once a ghost or projected entity turns.

This is the greatest horror of becoming a Spectre, of course — the complete loss of everything the person once was. Dying strips away much of a person's identity, and those last shreds of self (tethers) are all that keeps someone from moving on to whatever awaits. In becoming a Spectre, however, the spook gives in to Spite and allows another force hold over it, trading that precious ego for whatever feeds and guides Spectres. They are alien in outlook and apparently move with some shared goal — but what that goal is eludes Orpheus for the time being.

When using Spectres as antagonists, don't get too caught up in the gory details. One powerful Spectre slinking through shadows, never revealing itself, is just as frightening as a horde of malformed creatures bursting from a darkened room. Save the really graphic stuff for when characters are already in trouble and thinking it can't get any worse.

DEATH MERCHANTS

Various branches of the government, megacorporations, wealthy billionaires or perhaps even foreign powers employ "kites," freelance agents, for a variety of assignments. Death Merchant is an Orpheus designation for those mercenaries hired to watch or sometimes even assassinate Orpheus agents. Perhaps these powers fear that Orpheus Group is too close to some truths for comfort. Or maybe they don't like the notion of super-spies capable of bypassing any security measure. Or maybe they have a greater agenda in mind for the fledgling industry. Regardless, such agents are nearly impossible to track or capture since even they don't know for whom they're working. Being a Death Merchant's target usually means a crucible is treading close to something very important and sensitive (although it sometimes seems as though they attack out of the blue, for no particular reason).



As Storyteller, play kites for a sense of paranoia. A kite need never attack; have him assassinate an associate of the crucible's or destroy a spook's tether rather than assault the crucible directly. These are shadow agents whose masters remain hidden; all the characters will ever gain from a kite is an email address, and this leads to a dead end.

RIVAL GHOSTS

NextWorld and Terrel & Squib, of course, employ their own projectors and ghosts who might make life (or at least existence) difficult for the crucible. Nothing says other groups can't exist, however. A group of pigment users might have discovered how to project and started tailing the group, generally mucking up their advances. A group of ghosts with high Vitality ratings might find each other and take issue with Orpheus interfering in the affairs of the dead. The best antagonists for a crucible of characters might well be a group of individuals with similar capabilities.

When using this sort of antagonist, consider why they are targeting the crucible. Do they have a problem with Orpheus in general, the crucible in particular, or are they just looking for trouble? Depending on how driven they are, the adversaries might set traps to lure the crucible in, identify them and release their identities to the tabloids; find a projector's body and lead Spectres to it; haunt the characters' families; or anything in between. Also, decide whether the antagonists can stand up to the characters in a direct confrontation. If they can (or feel they can) they're likely to be more brazen. If they know they can't (perhaps the antagonists are a group of hues who want to "stick it to the Man") they'll probably resort to hacking, vandalism and other rather cowardly assaults.

RADIO FREE DEATH

Someone is broadcasting information every night at midnight through a satellite television provider, and the source of the transmission seems to be the characters' home city (that is, wherever you set your chronicle). That Radio Free Death is a spook of some kind seems clear, based on the information he disseminates, but even Orpheus doesn't know anything beyond that. The transmissions are usually cryptic and broken up by static, but sometimes they are useful. Mortals see only a burst of static or interference that grips their TV, leaving satellite providers believing it's a glitch they haven't solved yet. Some folks sensitive to this may see an image flicker or hear voices in the hiss (think *Poltergeist*), but rarely anything concrete. Still, it's becoming the stuff of urban legends, and more

than a few college students get together at night to smoke up and watch the weird broadcast burst that some people claim hides spooks.

If the characters use a hint provided by RFD and successfully complete a mission or discover an important fact, the transmissions might concern them more directly from then onward (since the transmitter realizes someone is listening). Orpheus, however, worries about this individual and advises the crucible against heeding his advice. Likewise, investigating RFD draws attention from kites — apparently this mysterious benefactor has other parties interested in him as well.

RFD doesn't know much about specifics outside of his own city (which is why he's based in your chronicle's city of choice). He usually gives warnings of a local nature ("Steer clear of Club Rumors; the bouncers can see us") and sometimes provides information about current events that don't seem immediately relevant to the dead. For example, he might mention that a certain councilman is sending his daughter abroad for college—the characters might investigate, only to find that the girl is crucial toward resolving a ghost's tether.

RFD does not lie or deliberately mislead his listeners, but he isn't omniscient, either. Feel free to have him give incomplete messages or incorrect information, but if you do, you should probably include a follow-up the following night ("Remember what I said last night? Forget it! Those aren't cultists — they're Jasons!"). Use Radio Free Death as a means to give information and direction to the characters, not to lead them into traps. The identity of this on-air Samaritan is one of the secrets to earn coverage down the road.

THE 11 COMMANDMENTS OF STORYTELLING

- Be Aware of Players' Expectations: Tell the kind of story in which players want to take part. If they're not interested in a spy story, don't use kites as your primary antagonists and don't lead them into a labyrinthine examination of Orpheus' inner workings. Play to what they want, but twist what they see. For instance, if they're sure that a supposed psychic can see them, you could instead make her completely insane. Or, she might be crazy, but also able to see ghosts. Don't give the players exactly what they want, but find out what they do expect.
- Plan Ahead: Some of the best games are run entirely on the fly, but it's often best to know, at least generally, where the game is headed. If you're obviously

scrabbling for direction, your players will lose faith in your Storytelling ability rather quickly. Know characters' motivations, the behind-the-scenes information and the framework of the game before involving the players at all.

- Don't Feel Shackled by Rules: If you don't like a rule, change it. They are meant to be tools, and that means if the rules are impeding the flow of the story, they aren't working.
- Keep it Real and Keep it Moving: Don't let the action bog down. That doesn't mean everything has to be suspense or combat, simply that if the players are at a loss for what to do, throw them a hook. Describe things in enough detail that the players have a sense for where their characters are and what's in the area, but don't go on for hours detailing every brick in the wall. The more involved the players are with their surroundings and with the story, the more they'll care about those things.
- Avoid Stereotypes: A stereotype is a tool of a lazy writer (or Storyteller). Don't make the guy behind the counter at the coffee shop a stereotypical gay man. For one thing, you may justifiably annoy your players. For another, you kill any chance of the players seeing him as a person, and then you've lost a potential plot hook. Don't fall back on the obvious; take an established notion and twist it if only a little.
- Rewards and Punishments: The characters should receive recognition and/or punishment in accordance with what they do. If they simply blunder around wrecking things, Orpheus isn't likely to give them raises. If they follow the organization's advice and manage victories out of it, however, Orpheus Group might well take more notice of the crucible and offer them more lucrative jobs (which carry bigger risks, naturally). Don't shortchange the characters' accomplishments, but don't reward them for nothing, either (which applies also to granting experience points).
- Secrets Are Lies: Use them anyway. Orpheus has many unseen facets, some of which even the Storyteller doesn't know initially. Keep these secrets as best you can, and make up more. The meat of a ghost story is the revelations, the horrifying clarity that emerges over the investigation's progress. Don't shortchange that by letting the players know too much too soon.
- With, Not Against: You are not the players' adversary. You are there to facilitate their enjoyment of the game. You don't "win" if you kill the characters or destroy them, and they don't "win" if they beat your antagonist. Remember that roleplaying games are a cooperative effort,

not a competition (and likewise, that means the story rests in everyone's hands, not just yours — don't force the players into your version of the story).

- Don't Panic: The players will change everything around, make decisions you didn't see coming and generally force you to rethink your carefully considered plot. Don't worry about it, just be ready to switch things around and improvise. If need be, call a break while you read through your notes and do some pruning. Don't become angry and don't allow frustration to influence your decisions; remember, you're working with the players.
- Use the Supporting Cast: The supporting characters shouldn't overshadow the crucible, but don't neglect this resource, either. From the crucible's compassionate, but slightly creepy boss at Orpheus to a character's girlfriend, every supporting character provides opportunities to flesh out the crucible and the world around them. Don't waste that by turning everyone who isn't an adversary into a faceless drone. Additionally, supporting characters allow the Storyteller to involve players through interaction who might otherwise sit on the sidelines. Use these personas to give each character a sense of a private life and personalized interactions. Each supporting character is an indication you gave the character with whom they're interacting some thought and consideration.
- The Dice Do Not Hate You: But they don't always cooperate, either. Feel free to fudge rolls whenever necessary, *especially* if it benefits the story and the characters. That includes the players' rolls (though you should be sensitive to a player's feelings on the matter; telling someone who rolled five successes that she actually failed is unwise).

TWISTED REFLECTIONS

The life of an Orpheus operative is fraught with excitement and intrigue — and no small amount of danger. Projecting opens up a whole new world to Shades in the company's employ, but lurking within that domain are myriad potential threats unimagined by the average person. This section presents a cross section of such dangers that Storytellers may employ as ready-made antagonists, allies or even just window dressing for their chronicles.

Each entry is divided into two pages. The first page is written from the Orpheus Group's often inaccurate or incomplete point of view. This allows Storytellers to photocopy these entries to distribute as props to their players, often in conjunction with mission sheets such as those in the Appendix (see p. 294). The second page in the entry is for the Storyteller's eyes only. It includes the threat's Traits, relevant information of which Orpheus Group is unaware and, most often, a write up of the signature character representing that type.

THREAT TAGS

Orpheus Group developed a system for organizing its opposition by the potential threat they represent to Orpheus agents, allowing for a quick assessment of potential dangers in the field.

Spooks are subcategorized as follows:

Drone-class — Ghosts with a Vitality of 1.

Blip-class — Ghosts with a Vitality of 2 or 3.

Echo-class — Ghosts with a Vitality of 4 or 5.

Mirage-class — Ghosts with a Vitality of 6 or higher.

Shadow-class — Spectres

Enigma-class — Unknown or new species

Non-ghostly threats are subdivided into the following:

Contender — Rival company or its personnel.

Nemesis — Actively hostile person or agency.

Confederate — Allied individual not affiliated to another group.

Collaborator—Allied individual within another group's infrastructure.

Foe — Hostile target with no agenda toward Orpheus Group.

Mark — Nonhostile target marked by an assignment.

Threats are then categorized into the following ranks:

Blue — Friendly

Gray — Neutral

Green — Uncertain

Red — Hostile

Thus, Orpheus might label a ghost going through its daily routine at the office where it worked in life, a Blip-class Gray (which Orpheus projectors might approach and interact with freely). A Reaper, however, who single-handedly eliminated an entire Orpheus crucible would be termed a Shadow-class Red threat to be avoided at all costs.



Spectres

Threat Tag: Shadow-class Red

FUMIGATE

Background: Spectres encompass a seemingly endless variety of forms. Each appears to have some apparent purpose within the Spectral hierarchy. Some Shadow-class breeds classified to date include Lost Boys, Black Vulcans, Reapers, Frighteners, Fetches, Pushers, Somnambulists and Hollow Men. The list is currently active and growing.

Since the Orpheus Group's founding, our crucibles have investigated a plethora of the mysteries surrounding life after death and have even settled many of them to the Group's satisfaction. Our investigations, however, have also uncovered several new enigmas we have yet to fathom. One of the most puzzling of these is a breed of ghost referred to in Orpheus terminology as Shadow-class and in the common parlance as Spectres (please note that the classification "Spectre" seems to have existed prior to Orpheus's exploration of the afterlife; we have not, as of yet, determined its origins).

Thus far, attempts to communicate with these "Spectres" have proved fruitless. In almost every case, the Shadow-class entity attacked the projector initiating the contact without provocation. In the few exceptions, the Spectres themselves fled, often returning in greater numbers with the same result as the other accounts.

At first, this merely proved a source of consternation, but then the first

Spectre-related deaths occurred among Orpheus personnel. Management immediately curtailed interaction with these creatures, limiting such contact to select occasions, and even then, only with an entire crucible involved in the effort. In all other encounters, projectors were instructed to immediately report back to command and inform them of the sighting. Soon after implementing these initiatives, the first concerted Spectre attacks took place. That was when management realized the Spectre threat was far graver than originally anticipated. Many disorganized groups of such entities existed. Although they themselves seemed incapable of communicating in even the simplest manner with Orpheus representatives, the Spectres proved capable of launching coordinated attacks against us, often with deadly consequences. These creatures seem somehow united in their efforts to destroy us, and if we are to believe the gossip among ghosts, them as well. But for what purpose? That remains unknown, though one theory is that these entities are extremely xenophobic; they will attempt to destroy any non-Spectral spirit, or, on occasion, living being they happen across.

The Spectre threat is very real. Spectre attacks have killed more than 23 employees to date. Don't underestimate them. They operate in groups like crucibles, many are of comparable power to projectors and what we don't know about these things greatly outstrips what we do know. All we can say with any certainty is that they're more dangerous than anything else we've encountered in this profession. These creatures are alien in their actions and ruthless of character. Show them no mercy and believe that none is offered in return; they will only use such misguided sentiment to kill you.

Status: Fumigate



SPECTRES

Without a doubt, the most dangerous adversaries an Orpheus crucible will ever face are Specters. A Spectre is related to a normal ghost in the same way a serial killer is cousin to the average person. Though it once walked the earth as a human being, the way other ghosts did, since its death the Spectre has fallen to the malignant influence of Spite and surrendered to its more feral urges. Forever after, it is a malevolent force dedicated to the extinction of life — a champion of death's design.

SPITE

A Spectre's Spite rating is as integral to its being as a Shade's Vitality is to spooks, and the value indicates how much Spite the creature possesses over the initial 10 rating that was used up in forging it into this blighted being. Spite is a measurement in fathoms of a Spectre's negative emotions, which constitute her gauze — the Spectre's positive emotions having long ago been excised. Thus, Spite is the Trait with which Spectres absorb damage; the higher the Spite, the "healthier" the Spectre. In a bizarre inverse of Vitality, the less Spite a Spectre possesses, the more alive it appears. Thus, low-Spite Spectres often look like dead, if somewhat mangled, people, while high-Spite Spectres often appear as something other than human. Spite also fuels a Spectre's Horrors in much the same way ghosts use Vitality to power theirs. See below for specific costs by Horror.

Unlike spooks, however, a Spectre's Spite rating remains constant and neither increases nor decreases except when the Spectre takes damage. Thus, Spectres tap their rating to elicit their powers, but they don't spend it (thus remaining at an even keel). In a scene, however, a Spectre cannot tap more Spite points than it has in its rating, unless it spends Willpower to reinvigorate itself (one Willpower allows it to tap or rejuvenate an equivalent three Spite). Thus, if a Spectre has a Spite rating of six, it cannot tap more than six Spite in a scene unless it spends a Willpower to tap up to a rating of nine Spite.

THE SPECTRAL ARSENAL

Spectres have a variety of disturbing abilities at their disposal with which to dispatch intrepid Orpheus agents and leave any survivors waking up screaming for weeks after an encounter. These are divided into two basic types: Horrors and Spectral powers called Thorns.

Thorns are all innate abilities Spectres possess that require no Spite to fuel. In many ways, they resemble the Stains familiar to Orpheus projectors, and like them, Thorns are ultimately tied to the peculiar psychology of the Spectre possessing them (a fact that clever projectors can learn to exploit). The following is a small sampling of some Thorns; the Storyteller may also use Stains to supplant a Spectre's abilities:

Carapace: The Spectre possesses some form of natural armor, allowing it to better soak damage. Different breeds of Spectre have differing degrees of armored protection. A Spectre's carapace may come in a variety of forms, anything from insect chitin to burnished steel skin.

Carapace Type	Soak (B/L)	
Chitin	+5B/5L	
Hide	+1B/1L	
Scales	+3B/3L	

Claws: The Spectre's hands end in wicked talons designed for rending gauze (or, in rare instances, flesh when used in conjunction with Manifest) and tearing apart foes. A Spectre typically deals (Strength + 1) lethal damage with these natural weapons, though some possess longer, more deadly claws that inflict even greater punishment in hand-to-hand combat. There are myriad types of claws that different Spectre breeds possess, such as hypodermic syringes for fingers, obsidian nails and steel hooks for hands.

Envelop: The Spectre may enfold its foes within its body, holding them fast. To use this power, a Spectre must successfully grapple its target (see Combat Maneuvers, p. 234). The following turn, the Spectre's form wraps itself around the target, immobilizing her. Unless the Spectre is destroyed, the spook remains trapped, usually until carried elsewhere. This power may take many forms. Some Spectres consist entirely of flayed skin and wrap their bloody hide around their victim. Others are protoplasmic monstrosities that envelop other spooks like an amoeba. Some Spectres even serve as crude transports for their fellows, holding them within their bodies until the time is right, releasing their deadly cargo onto an unsuspecting crucible.

Maw: The Spectre's mouth is a gaping maw of teeth capable of tearing loose large chunks of gauze with every bite. Each bite deals (Strength + 2) lethal damage to opponents in close combat. Maw types vary among breeds. Some may possess sharklike jaws of bone-crushing power. Others may have forearms covered in tiny mouths full of rusty razor blades for teeth.

Tentacles: In addition to its regular attacks, a Spectre possessing tentacles receives an extra hold attack each turn (see "Combat Maneuvers," p. 234). Sometimes, these tentacles are barbed, inflicting the Spectre's Strength in lethal damage each turn an opponent remains held. Usually, however, they merely immobilize their target.

SPECTRAL HORRORS

Like Shades, Spectres have their own unique Horrors. Unlike Shade Horrors, however, Spite fuels these powers. Seven of the most popular of these are:

Chill: This Horror allows a Spectre to generate an intense psychic cold in an area equal in yards to its permanent Willpower. For each Spite tapped, this cold deals one health level of bashing damage to everyone in that area, alive or dead.

Flicker: This power allows the Spectre to skip its form off the so-called Shroud, in a clumsy approximation of a Wisp's Storm-Wending. Though it does not permit for the long-range teleportation the Shade Horror does, it does make the Spectre hard to hit in combat; the creature appears and disappears at odd intervals and vibrates violently from the friction of contact with the Shroud when it is visible. Each Spite tapped by the Spectre adds one to the difficulty of any attempt to hit it in combat for the duration of a single scene. The Spectre's attacks are unaffected.

Flit: Flit enables a Spectre to defy gravity in several ways. Tapping a single point of Spite allows it to treat any direction as if it was down; thus, it can walk up walls or across ceilings. Tapping two Spite allows the Spectre to leap as much as (Strength x 3) yards in length. Tapping three Spite permits a Spectre to glide from any height safely, though it may not gain altitude. Tapping four Spite lets a Spectre float stationary in midair at any height. Five Spite

enables true flight at a maximum speed of (Willpower) yards per turn. The Horror lasts for a scene, and a Spectre using it has access to all the abilities equal to or beneath what it paid for that period. Example: If Hunger tapped two Spite to leap, the Spectre might land on a vertical surface, thus exercising the Horror's single point expenditure.

Hive-Mind: All Spectres are part of an extended group consciousness that allows them to communicate telepathically with others of their kind. Automatically, Spectres can send out a distress call to all other Spectres in the area or communicate telepathically with one another. For two Spite, a Spectre may sift through the Spectral hive-mind in search of a specific piece of information unknown to it. With three Spite, a Spectre may access a Horror previously unknown to it and use it for a number of turns equal to its Willpower (normal Spite costs apply to the use of this Horror). Tapping four Spite allows for direct mind-to-mind communication with the source of the hive-mind itself, calling in reinforcements from "elsewhere." Needless to say, a Spectre attempts such communication only when it is absolutely necessary.

Immolate: This power, in many respects, acts like a Spite-fueled version of Witch's Nimbus. The main



differences are that Immolate offers only fire-based effects, it may not be used at range and it inflicts an extra die of damage for each tapped Spite. The Horror's effects last for a scene. Example: Jack o' Lantern taps 2 Spite to activate Immolate. The Spectre's burning form now deals three levels of lethal damage to anyone who comes into contact with it. Note that Stealth rolls made against those pesky Orpheus projectors are at two greater difficulty.

Manifest: This Horror is exceedingly rare among Spectres, allowing them to manifest to the living in a manner similar to, but much more limited than, the way Shades may. For a two Spite tap, a Spectre with Manifest appears only as an indistinct image in the peripheral vision of those present. With three Spite, it appears as a terrifying apparition lacking physical substance, but capable of limited speech (usually limited to short expressions like "Swallow your soul!"). Tapping four Spite allows the Spectre to interact with the living as if it were alive. Regardless of the amount of Spite tapped, however, each of these manifestations lasts only a single scene.

Rend: The Spectre with this Horror can step "out of this world," into a parallel domain called the Shadowlands. By tapping a little Spite, Rend allows the Spectre to haunt ghosts, looking in on their activities and even communicating with them while remaining unseen and untouchable. At the highest level, it lets that same Spectre appear "from nowhere" to wreak havoc, then vanish as suddenly as it arrived. By tapping one Spite, a Spectre can peer through the Shroud to see what is occurring in the living land beyond. A second Spite tap allows the Spectre to hear what is happening there as well. Tapping three Spite lets the Spectres' voice or hive-mind telepathy pass across the Shroud, allowing for communication. A Spite four tap breaches the Shroud, allowing the Spectre to reach across and take things, though attacking would be impractical. Tapping five Spite pierces the Stormwall, allowing the Spectre to either enter or leave the shadowy land beyond it.

Virus: Almost as rare as Manifest, this Horror allows a Spectre to virtually overwrite itself onto the spirit of a low-Vitality ghost. Tapping one Spite enables the Spectre to see through the eyes of any ghost whose Vitality is three or less for a scene. A second Spite tapped gives the Spectre the ability to hear what is being said as well. For three Spite, a Spectre may manifest within a Vitality one ghost, overwriting the spirit's body and destroying said ghost in the process. Four Spite allows the same effect on a Vitality two ghost, while five Spite carries the effect to a Vitality three ghost. This Horror has no effect on projectors.

BREEDS

There are almost as many types of Spectres as there are grains of sand on a beach. Four of the most common breeds of Spectres encountered by Orpheus agents, however, are Lost Boys, Frighteners, Fetches and Reapers.

LOST BOYS

Named for characters from J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, the Lost Boys are Spectres that, in life, were children who died as a result of their parents' criminal neglect. By the time these kids pass on, they are so beaten down by life that it is only a short fall to Spectredom.

Lost Boys bear the signs of their neglect, their want etched into their forms. Each Lost Boy is just skin and bones — a veritable walking skeleton — with a distended belly more appropriate of a UNICEF ad than stalking the streets of America's largest cities. The creatures may be recognized as something other than a normal ghost by certain inhuman features. The first are their unnaturally huge dark eyes. Soulful and sad, they speak volumes of the creatures' needs, which (unsatisfied in life) are twisted in death. Other such features relate to satisfying those horrible needs — the Lost Boys' mouths are so wide when opened as to practically bisect their heads, and within that gaping maw are dozens of razor-sharp, sharklike teeth and the denticled, rasping tongue of a lamprey, which may ensuare prey up to a couple of yards away. Prey so caught is dragged into the Spectre's hungry jaws and devoured, though this does little to satisfy the gnawing hunger these creatures always feel.

Lost Boys are eternally hungry and scavengers of the dead that prey on the adults these Spectres recognize as having betrayed them in life. Though, by Spectre standards, the Lost Boys are individually weak, they typically travel in packs of five to 15, allowing them to challenge even more powerful prey — prey such as Orpheus crucibles.

HUNGER, THE LOST BOY

An Orpheus crucible discovered Hunger and his gang of Lost Boys infesting a Detroit orphanage. The state of Michigan closed the orphanage 18 months earlier after an investigation discovered that misappropriated funds, staff abuse and neglect were responsible for the deaths of over 20 orphans. The state slated the facility's reopening in August of last year, but a series of increasingly bizarre disturbances pushed that date back. Finally, in desperation, the state contacted the Orpheus Group. Given the structure's recent history, Orpheus sent a veteran crucible to investigate the matter. What it discovered was one of the largest recorded packs of Lost Boys. Orpheus scientists theorize that



the conditions at the orphanage were so horrendous that as the 20 orphans passed on, they quickly became Spectres. Though the crucible succeeded in fumigating the orphanage, Hunger and a group of five other Lost Boys fled into the city. They remain at large. Hunger was originally African-American and, like all Lost Boys, bears the marks of prolonged starvation. He's all skin and bones, with protruding ribs and a distended belly. Hunger, however, also possesses the sharklike maw, rasping tongue and the enormous, lidless black eyes common to Lost Boys.

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 1, Manipulation 3, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 3, Enigmas 3, Stealth 4, Streetwise 2, Survival 2

Nature: Child Willpower: 4 Spite: 6

Offensive Abilities: Flit, Hive-Mind, Maw, Tentacle (barbed)

FRIGHTENERS

A Frightener is a Spectre who comes into being as a result of a death so violent that it immediately drives that individual into Spectrehood. Such individuals are consumed with impotent rage at the manner of their deaths, and spend the remainder of their existence wreaking bloody vengeance for their condition on all they meet.

Frighteners are impossible to mistake for any other Spectre breed and invariably bear the marks of whatever killed them. A Frightener who died in a house fire appears smoking and charred, while one mauled to death by a bear forever evinces the bloody proof of that attack. Interestingly, psychologically speaking, a Frightener's method of attack also relates to its manner of death. Therefore, the Frightener who perished in a fire might possess the Immolate Horror, while the victim of the bear attack might have terrible claws and an enormous fanged maw.

There are few Spectral foes as implacable as a Frightener. Once committed to someone or something's destruction, a Frightener will not stop before achieving that goal. They never flee... they must either be avoided or destroyed.

JACH O'LANTERN, THE FRIGHTENER

Like all Frighteners, the one known to the Orpheus Group as Jack o' Lantern came to exist as the result of a death so violent that he became a Spectre upon passing over. From what Orpheus has deduced, Jack was a passenger on Flight 209, a hijacked airliner that crashed into the Atlantic Ocean, 20 miles out from JFK en route to London. The events of the hijacking — the terror experienced when the engines failed, the dread felt when the plane dropped from the sky and the horror of the passengers screaming for God's mercy — pushed the soul of the man who was to become Jack over to the dark side. Now, Jack o' Lantern is merely a vehicle of flaming vengeance, punishing those he meets for the events that killed him. With his charred skeleton and burning eye sockets, Jack is easy to spot. Typically, the focus of his revenge are passengers aboard planes that he happens to board. Jack is less concerned with accuracy than in inflicting pain and suffering to equal his own. Orpheus believes he may be responsible for one plane



crash already and for forcing two others to land.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 0, Perception 4, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Intimidation 4, Melee 3

Nature: Bravo Willpower: 7 Spite: 7

Offensive Abilities: Hive-Mind, Immolate, Manifest

FETCHES

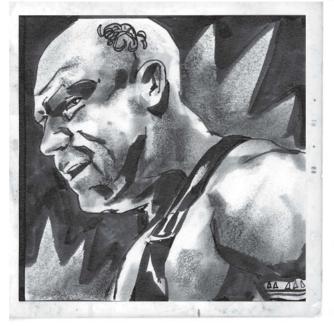
Operating as hounds, Fetches hunt down powerful ghosts and projectors who either have or might conceivably one day interfere with the Spectres. Whenever a spook expends a large amount of Vitality, thereby warranting Spectral intervention, it is almost always a Fetch who tracks down and dispatches the offender.

Given their tendency to use Flicker almost constantly, their true form is seldom if ever glimpsed; still, Fetches are distinctly inhuman in appearance. They almost look like hairless anthropomorphized dogs or wolves, with humanoid bodies and canine skulls.

Unlike Lost Boys or Frighteners, Fetches were never human and, thus, bear no human frailties. Their origins remain a mystery, though Orpheus believes they may be animal ghosts turned Spectres. They exist only to perform their one job, and they perform that job admirably. Though Reapers have successfully killed more Orpheus agents at a time, Fetches hold the record for most dispatched overall.

BASHERVILLE, THE FETCH

Baskerville is the nickname given to a Fetch currently operating around London's Baker Street near the United States Embassy there. Its name is a reference to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's The Hound of the Baskervilles. The Orpheus Group was investigating a potential embassy haunting, which was caused by a courier who died under mysterious circumstances. After several days of investigation, the Orpheus projector assigned to the case felt close to a breakthrough, which would help the courier deal with his death and move on. While using her Forbode ability to uncover the final piece of the puzzle, however, the courier suddenly convulsed violently, seemingly shaking himself to pieces, unveiling a blurred, but twisted shape beneath that moved in accelerated bursts — Baskerville. The two fought, but the Fetch got the better of the projector, forcing her to retreat to her body. When the projector returned with her entire crucible, both Baskerville and the courier's ghost were nowhere to be found. By talking to ghosts in the area, the crucible



learned this was no isolated occurrence. It seems the Fetch has, on several occasions prior, destroyed blips by manifesting within them to ambush a more powerful ghost. Orpheus agents in London have yet to discover if Baskerville is a single Fetch operating on its own or if "it" is in fact a group of the creatures mistakenly believed to be a single entity.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Enigmas 3, Expression 2, Investigation 3, Leadership 2, Linguistics 2, Performance 2, Stealth 4, Subterfuge 4

Nature: Deviant Willpower: 6
Spite: 8

Offensive Abilities: Claws, Flicker, Hive-Mind, Virus

REAPERS

Reapers are the most powerful type of Spectre encountered thus far by Orpheus Group agents; they seemingly operate as assassins, and as such, they are combatants of both subtlety and brutal efficiency.

These Spectres eliminate ghostly threats to other Spectres and do so in the most effective manner possible. They bear the countenance of the so-called "Grim Reaper," a personification of death popular since the Middle Ages, serving as walking symbols of the fear of death that most beings, both living and spook, share. Each Reaper stands nearly seven feet tall, with jet-black eyes and glossy-black chitinous skin that features ivory patches on the face and hands. Reapers wear tattered

black cloaks soaked in the gauze of countless dispatched spooks, and bedecked with lengths of rusted chains that occasionally seem to move with a will of their own. In their hands, the Reapers bear the tool of their trade — a terrible, sharp scythe with a shining blade over three and a half feet long.

Although Orpheus researchers believe Reapers were never human, these Spectres possess an alien intelligence different from, yet greater than, that of the average man. They employ this in service of Spectres and often surprise crucibles used to the stunted, linear thinking of Frighteners and their ilk. They know how best to use their arsenal of Spectral abilities and always manage their Spite wisely in combat.

Though the Reapers serve some nihilistic agenda, they are not so quick to hurl themselves into self-destructive acts as other Spectres do. They understand their self-worth and the importance of their mission. Only when the latter outweighs the former will a Reaper sacrifice itself rather than escape to return and finish the job at a more opportune time.

GRIMM, THE REAPER

Grimm and its ilk spark terrifying urban legends among ghosts and projectors alike. There are numerous apocryphal tales of Reaper appearances told by both ghosts and pigment users, and though the creatures look similar to personifications of death in art as depicted as far back as the Middle Ages, Orpheus personnel document only a handful of Reaper sightings. These few encounters, however, led to the deaths of more than 12 Orpheus employees, six of them projectors. In at least two encounters, the same Reaper was involved: Grimm (as dubbed by Orpheus). It's been identified as the same



Spectre by the small, vaguely heart-shaped patch of black at the center of its pallid face, a mark that accentuates the Reaper's deathlike appearance.

Grimm, like his entire breed, is a ghostly enforcer and assassin employed to eliminate problem ghosts. That duty now includes those projectors who stand in the way of its kind. This Spectre is not one to be underestimated, but to be feared.

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 4, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Intimidation 5, Investigation 2, Leadership 3, Melee 5, Occult 2, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 2

Nature: Monster Willpower: 10

Spite: 10

Offensive Abilities: Carapace (+5B/5L soak), Chill, Hive-Mind, Manifest, Rend,

Tentacles (barbed; chains) x 2

Name Speed Accuracy Damage Defense

Reaper Scythe -2 +1 9A +0

Jasons

The Orpheus Group is correct in its assumptions about these creatures. The truth is there are more Jasons roaming the streets than Orpheus would ever guess. Whenever a target's mind becomes so addled from pigment drug use that he effectively loses his identity, he is in danger of being noticed and possessed by any Spectre present that knows the Virus Horror. In these instances, conduct an opposed Willpower test, Spectre versus potential host. If the Spectre accrues more successes, it takes over the host, injecting its essence into him and obliterating him, much like certain Spectres do to low-Vitality ghosts. If the potential host wins the contest, the Spectre may not possess him until he partakes of pigment again. On a tie, the Spectre fails to possess the potential host, but may try again on the following turn.

If a projector is outside his skin then a Spectre may simply take up residence in the vacant body. Body snatching is only a threat if the Spectre spots the projector leaving his body behind, or is lucky enough to stumble across an empty vessel.

If one knows what to look for, Jasons aren't that difficult to recognize. The eyes, as the saying goes, are windows to the soul, which, in this case, has been replaced by pure malevolence. Looking into the jet-black eyes of a Jason is to glimpse the Nothing that spawned it. Once someone recognizes this indicator for what it is, there is no mistaking a Jason for anything but an engine of relentless destruction.

Jasons

Threat Tag: Enigma-class Red

Background: Until recently, Orpheus considered this threat apocryphal, an urban legend popular among our profession, created to explain unconscionable acts perpetrated by rogue Skinriders or garden-variety madmen. A recent bungled operation by one of our competitors, however, has eliminated all doubt as to these creatures' existence.

A Jason is the result of a Spectre possessing a live human host. Such hosts become remorseless killing machines fueled by an insane hatred of all that lives. Several Orpheus scientists theorize Jasons were responsible for spree killings in a number of small towns in the United States — Haddonfield, IL; Greenwood, MS; Arkham, MA — but no definitive proof of the creatures existed until the details of the Forest Hills Massacre came to light.

The manner by which a Spectre possesses a living human being is still under investigation. What is known is that these so-called "Jasons," once in possession of bodies, immediately embark on a campaign of violence, killing anyone with whom they come into contact.

Unlike the vast majority of mortal spree killers who use firearms to kill as many people as possible in the shortest amount of time, Jasons seemingly prefer the up-close-and-personal approach, wielding axes, machetes and kitchen cutlery to deadly effect. The Jasons also enjoy separating targets from one another, killing them one by one and leaving the mutilated bodies for the survivors to discover. It was, in fact, a combination of this deviation from the standard spree-killer profile and the killings' origin in an area suspected by locals to be haunted — Haddonfield's Mayers house, Greenwood's Camp Amethyst Lake and Arkham's Phillips University — that originally suggested these creatures' existence in the first place to certain Orpheus scientists.

Since Orpheus came into possession of the Forest Hills surveillance tapes, we've studied them frame by frame. Sooner or later, Orpheus agents are bound to run across one of these murdering machines in the field, and we don't want a repeat of the Forest Hills Massacre featuring our personnel. We're still in the dark about the why and how of these beings' origins, but as for the where and when, it seems that Jasons are birthed in locations of violent hauntings soon after a suitable host appears on the scene. Unfortunately, we at Orpheus are unsure about who exactly makes a "suitable host" for these creatures. Thus far, we only have physical evidence from a single occurrence. We need more data on this matter before reaching any firm conclusions.

One thing we have learned from the evidence is that, once a person is possessed by a Spectre, he becomes something both more and less than human. The person's physical strength increases greatly. There is documented video of a Jason stabbing a 6-foot-tall, 220-pound security guard through the sternum with a butcher knife, then lifting him one-handed and hurling the man over its shoulder. Additionally, the creatures are incredibly resistant to physical trauma. In one instance, in the foyer of the Forest Hill's mansion where the massacre took place, three security officers opened fire on their assailant. The Jason endured a confirmed 13 shots to its head and upper torso before dropping. And then, when one of the officers went over to investigate, it sprang up to stab him in the abdomen (despite prompt medical treatment, the guard subsequently died four hours later.) The apparent trade-off for these creatures' remarkable physical prowess is a loss of higher brain functions. While exceedingly clever hunters and killers, Jasons are not capable of long-term planning or making intuitive leaps. For that reason, we believe the best way to combat these creatures is not to outfight them, but outsmart them.

We need a crucible to track down the creature from Long Island and attempt to capture it for further study. Until we know more about these things, we ask projectors not to engage a Jason directly, merely to report any sightings or potential sightings to their superiors. Like Spectres, these creatures are not to be underestimated. It's possible they have abilities we have yet to discover.

Status: Gather Intelligence

CURRENT STATUS

The only Jason the Orpheus Group currently knows about is the Forest Hills murderer known as Hyde. Currently, Hyde is wandering the wooded areas of Parkdale, preying on the park's population of indigenous animals and the homeless. Soon, however, the Jason's patience will be rewarded when investigators find and try apprehending him.

In truth, not all Jasons are mindless homicidal maniacs. There are many different types of Jasons — violent ones, sly ones and even animal ones — and it remains to be seen if Orpheus can learn of and adapt to this fact before it's too late.

HYDE

Hyde is the product of a horrendously botched Terrel & Squib mission in Queens, New York. Blundering unprepared into an already volatile situation involving a Spectral infestation of a Forest Hills mansion, the T&S team inadvertently angered the Spectres. The Spectres retaliated, and one of them possessed the team's client, a pigment user named Arthur McAlester.

Unlike similar incidents elsewhere involving spree killers (which Orpheus later hypothesized were Spectres inhabiting human hosts), the whole "Queens' episode" was witnessed by trained T&S staff and recorded on both Kirlian and standard video cameras. The Spectre clearly enters the client's body in the Kirlian video, while the standard cameras capture the resultant carnage of McAlester's bloody rampage. The ax-wielding Jason slaughtered over a dozen T&S personnel, and in the resulting firefight, the mansion burned to the ground. An additional five people died in the blaze, including



the client's wife and three-year-old daughter. Arthur McAlester's body was never recovered, and so it's presumed he, or more precisely the thing in possession of his body, survived the fire and escaped.

As for the creature's name, apparently, a Terrel & Squib parapsychology technician asked her team leader "What the hell is that thing?" when it started its murderous rampage; when he responded with the single-word order "Hide!" she misunderstood that as the creature's name, Hyde. Apocryphal story or not, the name stuck.

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 0, Perception 4, Intelligence 1, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Intimidation 2, Melee 3

Nature: Bravo Willpower: 7
Spite: 10

Offensive Abilities: Hive-Mind (being embodied doesn't cut off the Spectre inside McAlester from its brethren), Ignore Wound Penalties (wound penalties do not apply to Hyde), Preternatural Strength (the Spectre's own Physical Traits augment that of its host's, adding 4 dots to Strength, 3 to Dexterity and 3 to Stamina), Regeneration (Hyde may tap Spite to heal physical damage he's sustained; it heals lethal damage on a one-for-one basis, while the expenditure of a single point of Spite heals all its bashing damage).

TERREL & SQUIB PHARMACEUTICALS

Terrel & Squib is Orpheus Group's chief competitor. Its background in "legitimate" science and its "clients first, no questions asked" ethic attracts customers who wouldn't touch the Orpheus Group with a 10-foot silver spoon. Much of the company's success in this new venture is attributed to the efforts of its founders, John Terrel and Dr. Lionel Squib; one possesses a keen financial sense and the other a pharmaceutical genius.

Dr. Squib was instrumental in researching, understanding and replicating the process to create pigment, and it was that revelation to Terrel two years ago that brought about T&S's entry into paranormal research. Somehow made aware of pigment's properties, Squib suggested to Terrel that the company shift its focus to paranormal investigations, pointing to Orpheus' unprecedented success in that arena. Sensing a keen business opportunity, Terrel agreed.

Unlike Orpheus agents, who often try helping ghosts come to terms with their condition, T&S teams capture ghosts, ostensibly for "reeducation" so they can become conscripted agents (read "slaves") for the company. This is how T&S makes up for the lack of projectors.

Terrel & Squib Pharmaceuticals

Threat Tag: Contender Gray
Background: Until quite recently, Terrel & Squib was just another struggling
pharmaceutical company trying to make a dent in a market sewn up by the much larger
multinational drug companies. Then, about a year-and-a-half ago, Terrel & Squib made
a surprise move and entered the field of paranormal investigation and elimination, a
lucrative market that, until that point, we at Orpheus Group dominated with no
competitors. What sparked this drastic change in market strategy remains uncertain.

Terrel & Squib's relative success, however, speaks for itself.

Terrel & Squib brought with it to this new venture an initial capital investment Orpheus could only have dreamed of at our outset. During its brief time in operation, Terrel & Squib already invested millions of dollars on advertising, recruitment and operating expenses. It markets its services to rich, high-profile clients — rock stars, nouveaux riches and the Hollywood elite — charging enormous sums to discreetly handle any problems they might have in any manner the clients sees fit... no questions asked. The high prices the company charges for its services are far beyond the range of a typical Orpheus client, but are well within the means of those elite with something to hide and wealth to spare.

Thanks to its deep coffers and questionable ethics, Terrel & Squib's paranormal division grows by leaps and bounds. It operates with a staff approximately three times as large as that of the Orpheus Group, though it only services a third of our annual clientele. Even among its enormous personnel base, there are only a handful of confirmed projectors (all skimmers), not nearly enough, it would seem, to properly

service even its admittedly small list of clients.

What Terrel & Squib lacks in projectors, it makes up for in ghosts, high-tech gadgetry and support staff. When Terrel & Squib arrives on the scene of a haunting, it deploys a team consisting of a dozen parapsych technicians, half that many security officers, a team leader and the occasional skimmer (but most often, a ghost or three). The team arrives in black Hummers and a black motor home modified into a mobile command base. It proceeds to unload vast amounts of parapsych gear — motion detectors, infrared and Kirlian cameras, magnetometers, temperature gauges and the like — and sets up a perimeter around the haunted site. Near is we can tell, all this flash and overkill is just to impress the client. As anyone on staff can attest, most "hauntings" turn out to be false alarms, merely natural phenomena misinterpreted by the paranoid or gullible. Terrel & Squib, by contrast, takes the aphorism "the customer is always right" to extremes. If a customer says she's being haunted, Terrel & Squib is ready to believe her, the truth of the matter notwithstanding. Then, it's lights, cameras, special effects, and faster than you can say "fraud," the client's property is rendered "clean" of plasmic manifestations and their bank account liberated of a cool half mil.

Unfortunately for Terrel & Squib's agents, sometimes a haunting is quite real. By our standards, Terrel & Squib routinely cuts corners on much-needed research time, often putting its staff — and, on occasion, its high-paying clients — at serious risk of

personal injury and death.

Relevant Personnel Terrel & Squib Pharmaceuticals is headed by the eponymous Mr. John Terrel and Dr. Lionel Squib. John Terrel was a '90s wunderkind who made a fortune during the Internet boom and was smart enough to pull his money out before the boom went bust. Dr. Lionel Squib is a Harvard-educated biochemist with more than 100 drug patents to his name. A mutual friend introduced the two soon after Terrel had unloaded his Internet stock, when he was looking for the next big thing. Dr. Squib convinced Terrel to join him in forming a brand new drug company using Terrel's capital and Squib's reputation.

Status: Gather Intel

CURRENT STATUS

Orpheus is constantly baffled by T&S's consistently poor intel capacity and even poorer training techniques. If it weren't for these shoddy work practices, Terrel & Squib could certainly give the Orpheus Group a run for its money. As it stands, despite an enormous capital investment in this new venture, Terrel & Squib continues slipping further into the red. If this continues, Orpheus suspects the corporation will run itself into the ground within five years (considered a conservative estimate by some). Perhaps more surprising, however, is that T&S is still expanding its operations and acting like a boom company when it should be tightening its belt.

HAREN ADAMS, TERREL & SQUIB PARAPSYCH TECH

Back when you attended Duke University's famed parapsychology department, you had no idea that one day you'd be in such a high-profile position, rubbing elbows with millionaires and superstars instead of working in some musty campus lab for menial research. You enjoy the travel and adventure your job affords you, and the salary is outrageous. Now, if you could just forget about what happened to your team in Queens and convince yourself it can't happen again.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 2

Abilities: Academics 2, Athletics 1, Alertness 2, Awareness 2, Bureaucracy 1, Computers 2, Empathy 2, Enigmas 1, Investigation 2, Linguistics 2, Occult 3, Science 3, Technology 3

Shade: N/A



Lament: N/A
Nature: Scientist
Willpower: 5

Equipment: Possesses Kirlian goggles. Also, she has access to and the training to operate T&S's top-secret labyrinth cages.

ROGER VOIGHT, TERREL & SQUIB GHOSTBREAHER

You saw some fucked-up shit when you worked S.W.A.T. back in D.C., but that's nothing compared to what you see working for Terrel & Squib — bleeding walls, stigmata, spontaneous combustion, you name it. Still, the pay's terrific, and you earn a month's paid vacation each year. Not a bad trade-off for the nightmares, headaches and substance-abuse problems you've been having, eh?



Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Drive 1, Firearms 3, Law 1, Melee 1, Intimidation 2, Intuition 3, Leadership 2, Security 3, Stealth 1, Survival 2

Shade: N/A Lament: N/A Nature: Defender Willpower: 6

Equipment: Pigment slap-patches allow him to see spooks if an operation goes south. Typical armament includes light pistol, sub-machinegun (including a single clip of ghostshot ammo that affects ghosts like they were flesh) and pepper spray. Outfitted with a bulletproof vest and a helmet with built-in com gear.

TERREL & SQUIB GEAR

Ghostshot Ammo: This is a specially treated form of 9mm ammunition that Dr. Squib designed to work on gauze and flesh. It does the appropriate light pistol or sub-machinegun damage, depending on the weapon firing it. The black material lacing the shell-casing remains unidentified, but it appears to be the same composite used in the construction of T&S's labyrinth cages.

Kirlian Camera: Stemming from the scientific research conducted in the 1940s by a Russian husband-and-wife team, Semyon and Valentina Kirlian, the Kirlian technique consists of photographing objects while exposing them to high-frequency electric fields. The resulting images capture the subjects' bioplasma on film or, given modern advances, videotape.

Kirlian Goggles: Kirlian goggles work as a miniaturized, close-circuit Kirlian video system, capturing bioplasmic images and overlaying them on the goggles' interior in the manner of a heads-up display. With this device, T&S agents can see spooks as though normal.

Labyrinth Cage: These are 10-foot cubes of blackalloy steel and smoked bulletproof glass with a remote control unit to open the cage wall. The ambient temperature of the area of use notwithstanding, the bars are bitterly cold to the touch. After a ghost enters the cage (usually through the haranguing efforts of T&S projectors or the liberal application of ghostshot autofire), the door closes, trapping the ghost within. Labyrinth cages are as solid to ghosts as they are to the living and are nearly impossible to escape from since none of the locking mechanisms are accessible from the interior. Their most vulnerable areas are their sliding-glass doors, but even they require 10 health levels of lethal damage before creating a large enough hole through which a ghost can slip (the glass has a soak of 10B/10L). Perhaps more unusual is that Vitality expenditures within a labyrinth cage actually repair damaged glass and bars, with each Vitality healing one lethal or four bashing levels of damage to the structure. Following this absorption of Vitality is a drop in temperature around and within the device itself, similar to the effect caused by the Spectral power Chill (with the Vitality spent substituted for Spite to determine damage; the radius of the effect is equal to the Vitality spent in yards). Thus, high levels of Vitality expenditure on Horrors, those that might actually succeed in breaching a cage, cause as many problems as they solve. Outside help is usually the only way to escape from a labyrinth cage, as is spending Spite to call upon Stains.

NEXTWORLD, INC.

NextWorld's roots lie buried in the shadow world of Cold War Soviet military, and their experiments into the realm of psychic abilities and paranormal phenomena. GRU (Soviet Military Intelligence) rounded up dozens

of potential psychics, as well as Siberian shamans and Central Asian Sufi mystics for Project Zmei in the 1980s. It was an effort to create psychic agents out of Soviet military personnel, but official reports indicate the project was a resounding failure when the Soviet Union collapsed.

Coinciding with Soviet Russia's disintegration, Gen. Derkov, one of the project overseers, fled the country, taking copies of the project's research with him. Considering the relative failure of Project Zmei, the GRU ignored Derkov's desertion for greater concerns like the theft of Russian nuclear-grade materials. They didn't realize that the research was not so great a failure as Derkov had led his superiors to believe.

Derkov quickly searched for ways to turn his military experience and connections, as well as his research, into a profit-making venture. He didn't have to look far. Sir Alfred Williams found him. Williams was a former troubleshooter for DeBeers with extensive connections to various British intelligence services. With his American partner, Sydney Riley, Williams had established an organization of professional mercenaries that offered its services to corporations and anyone else able to afford them. The two men approached Derkov, hoping his military connections would give them access to a new pool of professional talent. Derkov gave them something more: Project Zmei.

It took years to replicate the limited success of the original project (the original soldiers spent years undergoing instruction in biofeedback and mental conditioning), and both Williams and Riley were ready to cut their losses with Derkov's contribution. Derkov, however, had an unexpected breakthrough. One of his subjects became a projector. Tests performed with additional subjects managed to produce two more skimmers. After determining that all three men had undergone numerous near death experiences, Derkov developed a fairly consistent program (now known as Project Firebird) for creating projectors. Derkov simply failed to mention that his breakthrough happened because he sent agents to steal the newly emergent Orpheus Group's research notes, and subsequently adjusted his own techniques accordingly.

CURRENT STATUS

All of NextWorld' living agents have backgrounds in the military, intelligence services or law enforcement agencies. NextWorld presently has three dozen projectors, and they've successfully recruited a dozen ghosts (an even mix of hues and spirits). These agents are the company's elite, used for paranormal investigations as well as industrial espionage, psychological warfare (haunting) and assassinations. NextWorld sees Terrel & Squib Pharmaceuticals as the primary competition for

NextWorld, Inc.

Threat Tag: Contender Green

Background: Officially, NextWorld, Inc. is a private security firm typically hired by governments and political figures in the bloodbath of Third World politics. Unofficially, NextWorld are professional mercenaries with an extensive list of for-hire-killers with Special Forces training. If you have a problem that you can't deal with through conventional channels, and if you can afford them, NextWorld can arrange for your problem to disappear. Unlike Orpheus Group and Terrel & Squib Pharmaceuticals (see attached file), NextWorld, Inc. does not advertise its services. Initial speculation that NextWorld clientele come to the company by word of mouth was recently confirmed with field agent observations. It is unclear when NextWorld expanded its services to include paranormal investigation and elimination, but we became aware of these activities approximately six months ago.

NextWorld prides itself on its agents' professionalism, competence and strict adherence to client confidentiality. This level of discretion makes the company especially attractive to its clients. Even if it becomes known that someone hired NextWorld, the specific services they perform for a client will never become public knowledge. People who use NextWorld's services because of paranormal concerns typically wish to avoid the media spectacle that often accompanies Terrel & Squib operations, as well as any possible media attention associated with the Orpheus Group. As a result, NextWorld clientele, both confirmed and suspected, is a who's who of multinational corporations, political figures and wealthy individuals of dubious merit. The number of active NextWorld personnel is currently unknown, but we believe it to be less than that of Orpheus Group. The level of training and experience for NextWorld agents, however, far exceeds that of most Orpheus employees. Over seventy percent of NextWorld operatives we've identified are former military personnel, with at least half of those being involved in Special Forces operations. The remaining members are primarily from law enforcement, often with special weapons and tactical training; we identified at least one as a former member of the Central Intelligence Agency. Although we know NextWorld does use projectors, we've been unable to accurately determine how many the group employs.

Many of NextWorld's official activities involve bodyguard work, private surveillance and security consultation. Often, this is used as a cover to investigate and deal with hauntings and other paranormal activities for their client. Unofficially, NextWorld agents also engage in acts of industrial espionage, arson, assault and battery, and blackmail. We also suspect it of being involved in at least one disappearance and three murders. NextWorld's rate begins at \$100,000 a week and increases depending on the nature of the assignment and the number of agents required. The cost for extralegal activities appears to begin at half a million per assignment. Payments for official activities are handled by a bank in the Caribbean, suspected of laundering money for the Russian Mafiya. Payments for off-the-record assignments are reputedly funneled through one or more privately owned family banks in Switzerland.

Relevant Personnel

NextWorld's Chief Executive Officer is Alexis Derkov, a former General in the Soviet GRU (Military Intelligence). Derkov left Russia in the early 90s for reasons we haven't determined. NextWorld's Chairman of the Board is Sir Alfred Williams, a native of Britain who spent two decades in the employment of the DeBeers diamond cartel. The Chief Financial Officer is Sydney Riley, partner in the law firm of Riley, Taylor and Wendt. These three men are the sole members of NextWorld, Inc.'s Board of Directors.

Status: Gather Intel



their preferred clientele. The Orpheus Group is more of an annoyance than a serious rival, a point of view that could seriously handicap NextWorld in any dealings with Orpheus.

LAURENS DU TOIT, NEXTWORLD AGENT

A native of rural South Africa, Laurens possesses the casual attitude toward death that can come about only from growing up on one of the deadliest continents on Earth. He encountered fatal circumstances a dozen times over in his life, from snake bites on the family farm to bullet wounds in street skirmishes. His work for DeBeers brought him to the attention of NextWorld, and his background makes him the perfect candidate for Project: Firebird. Despite his talent for the almost effortless infliction of violence, he remains friendly and charming in social situations.



Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Intimidation 4, Subterfuge 1, Drive 2, Firearms 3, Investigation 1, Law 1, Linguistics 2, Medicine 1, Meditation 2, Melee 2, Security 3, Stealth 2, Survival 3

Shade: Poltergeist Lament: Skimmer Nature: Survivor Willpower: 7 Vitality: 7 Spite: 5

Offensive Abilities: Congeal, Helter Skelter

Equipment: Laurens is typically armed with a Glock 9mm automatic pistol and a fighting knife, but can requisition additional weapons and equipment (including military grade hardware) as needed.

STATIC REPEATERS AND BLIPS

Blips and drones are among the weakest challenges characters will face. All, be they spirits or hues, exhibit the same basic traits. Vitality is always one for drones and two or three for blips. If a ghost's Vitality rating exceeds three, he becomes an Echo-class ghost and is considered either Allied or Hostile depending on his behavior. Likewise, Spite is also one for all blips and drones, though it can be as high as two or three for special cases. If it increases, the low-ebb ghost becomes a Spectre rapidly since his Spite is matching or exceeding his Vitality almost immediately. Willpower is between 1 and 3 (human average or lower). Because of their low Vitality, static repeaters and blips have very limited use of their powers. Dead-Eyes follows the same rules as for player characters (see p. 82), but blips and drones are limited to the basic Horror for their Shade. Many only use the Horror instinctively, and most remain oblivious to any of their own abilities. These ghosts rarely have Attributes rated above 2, and usually have few if any notable Abilities. Drones are limited to zero-Vitality-point manifestation forms, while blips can use one-Vitality-point forms.

Drones and blips do very little. Most haunt the place of their death or dwell around people and places important to them in life. They typically go unnoticed until they manifest.

THE ROSE GIRL

The Rose Girl went to all the trendy nightclubs, but to sell roses. She earned her keep a dollar at a time, and still made less money than the beggars looking for handouts. It was a bitter and lonely life, one punctuated by a back-alley rape and stabbing that stained the snow around her redder than her roses. That's all she remembers now. She exists only in those final moments in the nightclub and the back alley.

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 1, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Awareness 1, Empathy 3, Etiquette 2

Shade: Wisp Lament: Spirit Nature: Child Willpower: 3 Static Repeaters and Blips

Threat Tag: Drone- and Blip-class Green

Background: The vast majority of ghosts are static repeaters or blips, entities lost to their own misery and misfortune. These low-ebb entities are the most common ghosts encountered by Orpheus agents, and they constitute a large amount of our work. As with all ghosts, they fall into two basic categories:

The hue population, while still low, is continuing to rise and produce lowebb ghosts, some in danger of "washing out" completely. Spirits are far more common, and seem as likely to become static repeaters and blips as hues. They are also far more diverse with fewer commonalities between them. Since Orpheus began operations, we have cataloged a wide variety of spirits. The only common traits are the same low levels of activity and self-awareness that mark all drones. Almost all drones and blips encountered by Orpheus agents are entirely oblivious to the fact that they're dead. These entities simply continue carrying out actions related to the final moments of their lives or to actions they performed frequently while living. Such activities include everything from loitering in clubs and on street corners to endless repetitions of the ghost's death scene (one such example being the hue in Seattle whose entire existence consists of walking in front of the same city bus each evening).

The low level of energy evidenced by these spirits makes them relatively easy to deal with, at least physically. Such ghosts, while capable of the same abilities demonstrated by Orpheus agents, lack the energy to fuel their effects except at the lowest levels. Many static repeaters and blips appear limited to the most basic abilities of manifestation. The difficulty in dealing with these PLEs, however, lies in the challenge of identifying and determining how to assist them. Many appear oblivious to the existence of any other ghosts or projected entity, including Orpheus agents. Others recognize the presence of particularly vibrant agents, but are unable to understand who the agents are, frequently mistaking them either for people they knew in life or for people they would expect to encounter during their routine. These traits result in turning individual ghosts into a puzzle to solve. This combination of factors (low physical threat, plus the need for problem solving) makes low-ebb post-lifers the preferred choice of first assignment for new field agents. Status: Varies





Vitality: 2 Spite: 1

Offensive Abilities: Unearthly Repose

Notes: The Rose Girl is presented as a murder mystery for the players' characters to solve. Details of her death and what happens to her as a result of the characters' actions are left for the Storyteller to decide.

ALLIEDGHOSTS

Orpheus' assessment of allied ghosts is entirely accurate. Ghosts will ally themselves and cut deals with Orpheus (as well as Terrel & Squib, NextWorld and other factions) for all the reasons outlined. In fact, all these groups, Orpheus included, make use of double agents. These ghosts present themselves as potential allies to gather information, feed false information to the other group, manipulate the target group's operatives (meaning the characters) and, if need be, eventually betray the group to their rivals or enemies. Even close friends may turn on the character if conditions are right.

Storytellers can create these supporting characters along the same model as the characters, though they are often not as powerful. The typical allied ghost is an Echo-class (Vitality four or five) one, with only one or two Horrors (most often only the basic Shade Horrors). Echo-class Willpower is typically half that of starting Willpower for a particular Shade + Lament combination, though the Spite rating remains the same and they can manifest fully. Allied ghosts rarely possess any Orpheus backgrounds unless they garnered them through deals with Orpheus agents.

More important supporting characters may be Mirage-class (Vitality six or higher) ghosts and possess abilities on par with Orpheus operatives. The Storyteller may create these ghosts as players would a character.

JOEY COOPER, HUE SNITCH

Joey knows almost everything happening on the streets, and if the price is right he might share some of his information. If somebody can't afford his price, too bad. Life is tough and he's only looking out for Number One. He forgot that rule once and ended up dead in an alley for his troubles. Being dead isn't too bad. After all, he doesn't have to pay rent anymore.



Still, he'd kill for a cigarette and something to drown out the Spectre chorus in his head.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Intimidation 1, Linguistics 1, Stealth 1, Streetwise 4, Subterfuge 3

Shade: Skinrider Lament: Hue Nature: Conniver Willpower: 3 Vitality: 4 Spite: 5

Offensive Abilities: Puppetry; Stain: Joey continuously emits a noxious smoking fog from his mouth and nose. If necessary, he can belch it forth in even thicker volumes to facilitate escape and cause injury (one die

Allied Ghosts

Threat Tag: Echo- or Mirage-class Blue

Background: Although Orpheus makes every effort to recruit non-hostile ghosts into our organization, several of these potential recruits turn down our offers of employment. The reasons for this are many. Some do not wish to be a part of any organization while others have little interest in our goals. While these ghosts do not wish to be a part of Orpheus, however, many are willing to work with Orpheus agents in the field. Motivations for these temporary alliances vary from individual to individual, but typically fall under one of three basic categories.

The first and most common category belongs to those who ally with Orpheus for purely mercenary reasons. Allies only in the most nominal sense, these ghosts expect to be compensated for their time and effort. Many such entities operate in much the same manner as police informants, trading information and personal favors in exchange for spiritual energy, future considerations or some other form of currency. Other mercenaries will offer specialized skills ranging from technical expertise to brute force, provided the price is right. Rarely do such individuals work for actual money, unless they request such rewards be anonymously transferred to a living friend or relative.

The next most common source of allied ghosts is those whose goals temporarily coincide with ours. As with mercenaries, such ghosts work with us on a case-by-case basis. Typically, these post-life entities are motivated by the desire to protect some location or living persons who is important to them. Self-preservation also serves as a potential catalyst, with such ghosts turning to Orpheus agents to help them deal with a hostile third party. Others appear to hold long-term goals that make alliances with Orpheus agents useful for the time being.

Finally, the rarest form of allied ghost is the true ally. Such independent agents are often friends (or close acquaintances) with one or more Orpheus personnel. These individuals aid Orpheus out of friendship, often with the unspoken understanding that their friends here at Orpheus will aid them when needed. Orpheus requests that those field agents in contact with ghosts please report all such alliances to their supervisors so we can better assess our agents' overall capabilities when assigning missions.

Novice agents dealing with mercenary ghosts and temporary allies are advised to exercise caution. Such individuals are often of questionable loyalty and several field teams have reported instances of betrayal. Many mercenaries are perfectly willing to cut better deals with another side, and those who pursue their own goals outside of Orpheus are very likely to betray agents if they feel it'll help advance their own agendas.

Status: Report All Contact

Hostile Ghosts

Threat Tag: Echo- or Mirage-class Red

Background: While many ghosts encountered by field agents are either non-hostile or harmless, aggressive entities remain a primary danger of our work. It is important that Orpheus agents recognize such ghosts and deal with them as the situation warrants. While hostile entities are as diverse as any group of individuals, we can divide them into three broad categories based on motivation. By understanding these reasons, field agents can better deal with hostile ghosts.

The most common motivation for hostility is territoriality. Such ghosts lay claim to something and defend it against any and all perceived challengers, but the ghost's "turf" can literally be anything including people, places and objects. While this territorial nature usually stems from a benevolent desire — to protect a loved one or to preserve an item of great personal significance - this attention almost inevitably borders on obsession. A deceased spouse or parent will relentlessly harass and even attack anyone who takes a romantic interest in their living husband, wife or progeny. Others will consistently disapprove of the new owners of a beloved house, car or item. Our agents encountered ghosts whose obsessions involved everything from wedding rings to children's toys. Some ghosts even fixate on immaterial items, like their personal or familial reputation, social causes and political movements. While agents can reason with some of these hostile entities - often by offering Orpheus's aid in protecting the source of their fixation — other ghosts fall so far into obsession and paranoia that any such effort is an exercise in futility.

Similar in many respects to territoriality is the need for vengeance. It's no secret that foul play is responsible for producing an unfortunate number of ghosts. Often, these PLEs seek out those responsible for their untimely deaths and attempt to gain some form of revenge. As admirable as this effort may seem to some, ghosts of this nature frequently lose all sense of perspective and restraint. Collateral damage, including the deaths of innocent bystanders, becomes acceptable as long as the ghost avenges herself. In addition, many resentful ghosts blame innocent people for their demise, and launch campaigns of harassment and terror against scapegoats with little or no involvement in the ghost's untimely end. As with territorial entities, some vengeful ghosts are open to reason. If Orpheus agents can collect significant evidence to incriminate the murderers and have them punished by the law, the ghost may willingly cease its activities and perhaps even become an ally of Orpheus. Unfortunately, many such entities are unwilling to listen to reason and will not be satisfied with anything short of death... anyone's death

The final and least common motivation is malice. Whether because the ghost is sadistic or selfcentered, some PLEs enjoy inflicting pain and suffering for their own twisted amusement... or because they can get away with it. Such hostile entities are among the most difficult opposition facing agents. There is often no rhyme or reason to their attacks and they are almost impossibly and uniformly intractable. If denied their amusement in one location, they simply seek out another target.

Because of their nature, such ghosts must almost always be permanently contained or even destroyed. Dealing with such spirits is made all the more difficult by how easily some can be mistaken for Spectres (see attached file) and vice versa. Agents are advised to use extreme caution when dealing with these entities.

Status: Fumigate if Necessary



of Bashing damage to anyone caught in the choking, toxic fog cloud; two to the difficulty of all actions for those caught within the smoke).

HOSTILE GHOSTS

Both spirits and hues strike out against the living for varied reasons, but these motivations typically fall under the headings outlined in Orpheus' report. One motivation overlooked in that report, however, is greed. Some entities haunt the living in exchange for favors similar to those sought by allied ghosts (see p. 281). Perhaps the reason Orpheus fails to inform its field agents of this fact is because Orpheus itself sometimes uses such outside operatives. Other factions also hire independent agents, and an Orpheus crucible investigating a routine haunting may easily find the trail leading back to any number of agencies... perhaps even to Orpheus.

Hostile ghosts are typically Echo-class entities, with a Vitality rating of four or five, as well as a high Spite rating representing the ghost's rage and frustration at the living (+2 Spite over starting Shade and Nature score). The ghost's Spite rating may exceed his Vitality rating, indicating that the entity is well on the way toward becoming a Spectre. Shades and Horrors can run the spectrum, but more physically destructive powers like Helter-Skelter, Puppetry, Juggernaut, Witch's Nimbus are the most prevalent. The typical Echo-class hostile has two Horrors. Storytellers hoping to provide their players with a comparable challenge to themselves can use Mirage-class hostiles.]

THEPHANTOMHACHER

True genius is never recognized when it's alive. Now that Sandy Mansfield is dead, he's damn sure going to get the respect he deserves, and everyone who made his



life hellish will pay. Everyone knows how destructive a computer can be in the wrong hands. Wait till he possesses it and kills them through electrocution or screen shrapnel. Wait till he lays bare their secrets.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 1, Manipulation 3, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Awareness 2, Computers 4, Enigmas 2, Security 2, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 2, Technology 2

Shade: Haunter Lament: Spirit Nature: Child Willpower: 5 Vitality: 6 Spite: 6

Offensive Abilities: Helter-Skelter, Inhabit, Witch's Nimbus

ANMAL GHOSTS

While animal ghosts are rare, they do exist. Animals, whether living or dead, are rated according to their Physical Attributes only, with Perception automatically at 3, and their Abilities limited to the most basic of instincts (Alertness, Athletics, Brawl, Stealth and Survival are the most common). The majority of animal ghosts are drone or blip-class entities, with only the most basic of ghostly powers (Incorporeal & Invisible, Manifest and Dead-Eyes). An extremely rare few can become Echoclass ghosts, but even then, such creatures are unlikely to develop beyond the basic Horror of their Shade.

Only warm-blooded animals seem to become ghosts, though if reptiles and other lesser creatures have, then it's likelier to mistake them for Spectres. Avian ghosts typically default to the Banshee Shade. Wild animals favor the Poltergeist Shade, while domesticated animals tend toward Wisp or Banshee. Certain vermin (like rats) that nest in or near human dwellings may default to Haunter instead. Skinrider animal ghosts are unheard of, and if such a creature exists, it may be unable to possess anything outside its own species. Storytellers may, of course, twist or ignore these guidelines at their leisure.

Animal ghosts exist, but the reasons why they persist means that few actually enter this state. Animal ghosts come about because they exhibit a particularly strong emotion toward the living, whether they've always been there to protect their beloved owners, or because they were abused to the point of becoming vicious and thoroughly malevolent. There must be some emotional attachment that allows them to exist as ghosts, to maintain a weak echo. Their Vitality almost never exceeds three, and even then that's a very aware animal. Their Spite, however, can be higher, up to five, while their Willpower is likely as strong given their tenacity to persist as ghosts.

Animal Ghosts

Threat Tag: Enigma-class Gray

Background: Over the past year, we've received a small, but steady stream of reports contradicting our existing data on the nature of ghosts. These reports concern the existence of post-life entities that appear, for lack of a better explanation, to be the spirits of deceased animals. Prior to this intel, all existing evidence indicated that only humans could become ghosts (or, at the very least, that human ghosts were the only ones capable of interacting with the living). The following is a summary of reported encounters

between Orpheus personnel and animal ghosts.

o Portland, Oregon: Brundle Pharmaceuticals contacted Orpheus to investigate a series of preternatural phenomena at the company's Portland research facility. Initial soft probes by the field team discovered a pair of spirits roaming the premises at night. The team determined that the two entities were actually dogs in Brundle's drug research. Reports indicate that researchers used pigment on the animals to determine the hallucinogen's effects, thus providing the test animals abilities similar to those of human projectors. The dogs could project throughout the facility while sleeping. Brundle has since allowed us to transfer the two animals to Orpheus' labs for further study, on condition we share

our findings.

o Birmingham, Alabama: A field team investigating potential poltergeist activity confronted an unusually large entity that appears, from team description, to be a qhost-elephant. All attempts to communicate with the entity have failed, and we can only assume that the ghost was in fact an animal. Further investigation revealed that a roque bull elephant was put down following an incident at the city 200, providing supporting evidence for a ghost animal. All attempts to contain the entity failed, however, resulting in the serious injury of two field agents. At present, the entity remains at large, but there have been five potential sightings throughout the greater Birmingham area. o Boston, Massachusetts An Orpheus field team reports at least a dozen sightings of small swarms of spirit-rats. The rats manifested in at least three separate neighborhoods, attacking bystanders and damaging property when they appeared. One field team managed to locate a possible source for the swarms in a warehouse used by local pigment dealers. Apparently, a large nest of rats tried eating a shipment of the drug and overdosed. Currently, this is our first and best lead. The rats, however, have now spread throughout the city, apparently splitting into several smaller packs of fifteen to twenty vermin each. Originally, the rats demonstrated the most rudimentary of paranormal abilities (typically only manifesting visually or audibly). More recent reports, however, indicate the rats possess additional abilities, including inhabiting small mechanical and electrical devices in one case. This is an alarming development. Even if the creatures' powers don't grow further, their ability to hide in items might necessitate property damage just to eliminate them.

While these remain the most current intel we have on animal ghosts, we expect this collection to increase. All Orpheus personnel must report any and all possible encounters with such entities. Field agents should also use extreme caution when dealing with these creatures, since we're still unsure of their full capabilities or the possible danger they present.

Status: Gather Intelligence; Retrieval



SPECTRAL HOUND

The Spectral Hound is a large dog that roams the small town it once knew as home. It can serve as an ally or enemy, and its temperament depends entirely on the Storyteller's needs. Whether the animal was beloved by all the locals and persists as a guardian entity of sorts (Banshee) or it knew nothing but pain and abuse, and exists to wreak havoc (Poltergeist) are both viable options.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Intimidation 3, Stealth 2

Willpower: 5

Vitality: 3

Spite: 2

Offensive Abilities: Bite (five dice of lethal damage); either Helter Skelter (Poltergeist) or Wail (Banshee).

PIGMENT

In truth, the Orpheus Group knows a little about pigment since it's an addictive offshoot of the drug originally developed to help skimmers project. Orpheus lost the ability to replicate the drug when its lead scientist (Dr. Harold Vermeer) died, but found other mixtures capable of eliciting the same effect without the drawback of turning projectors into hues.

The main difference between Orpheus' original compound and pigment is the inclusion of higher amounts of opium and peyote, as well as the mysterious missing link developed by Orpheus' original research. Orpheus' compound was designed to expand consciousness while pigment is based around its addictive qualities. Other than that, the two drugs are practically identical.

Orpheus is terrified that someone might successfully link their original research with pigment, but even they don't know how their material was stolen. Orpheus' Executive Leadership Team, however, suspects that someone captured Vermeer's ghost and extracted the information from him. It's unsure exactly who corrupted the group's work on the drug, however.

CURRENT STATUS

So far, most of what Orpheus learned of pigment came to light during other investigations. Orpheus' leadership has been concerned that any investigation it might launch into pigment's proliferation might eventually lead agents back to them. The recent interest in pigment shown by federal and local law-enforcement agencies throughout North America, however, is forcing the group's hand. Better by far that Orpheus' own agents uncover its secrets than an outside agency. After all, by keeping crucibles operating on different parts of the pigment investigation, Orpheus decreases the likelihood that the whole truth is ever uncovered by any of its projectors; if worse comes to worst, Orpheus always has ample opportunities to eliminate projectors who learn too much — an unplugged sleeper unit here, an air embolism in a skimmer there, and poof, no more problem.

CASSANDRA RHODES, PIGMENT ABUSER

A drama student at the University of Michigan, Cassandra Rhodes always craved attention, any kind of attention. Growing up in small-town Georgia, she constantly worried her parents, both devout Southern Baptists. As a teen, she picked the worst boyfriends, got into fights at school and was busted twice for underage drinking. Truth told, her parents were relieved when Cassandra followed her would-be artist boyfriend to attend school in Ann Arbor.

At the university, Cassandra's behavior only worsened. Still demanding the spotlight, Cassandra enrolled in the school's drama program. As usual, however, the young woman fell in with the wrong scene, this time the university's raver crowd. As a result, despite having some aptitude for theater, Cassandra has yet to receive more than bit parts in any play; her grades have also suffered.

Rather than studying or honing her craft, Cassandra spends her nights at some party or club indulging in sex, drugs and dance — not necessarily in that order. Until recently, Ecstasy was her vice of choice since it heightened her sense of belonging, making her feel like everyone was just there to watch her. For the past few weeks, since the start of the semester, she's experimented with a new drug in the area, pigment. Cassandra appreciates the poignancy the drug lends her personal dramas, plus there's a whole new

Pigment

Threat Tag: Mark Green

Background: Approximately two-and-a-half-years ago, a new drug hit the streets, and in the time since, it has taken the drug subculture by storm. The drug is called pigment. It is cheap, it is highly addictive and it has one additional property that warrants its inclusion in Orpheus Group's files. It allows users to see ghosts.

Now, admittedly, given the drug's hallucinogenic properties, few people outside of Orpheus, including the vast majority of pigment's users, even known it has this side effect. The fact that it does, however, warrants our interest in this drug's production facilities, its producers and the reason for its creation. The chances that a designer drug like pigment just happens to produce such an unprecedented effect seems highly unlikely.

Since pigment first appeared, the Drug Enforcement Agency has linked it to over 200 deaths, mainly overdoses, though a dozen homicides and twice that many suicides have been attributed to the drug locally. Law-enforcement agencies gave it the nickname "black heroin" because of its ebony color and the death toll it racked up in so short a time.

The drug is most popular among casual drug users, ravers, college students and the like. It seems to be the new recreational drug of choice, displacing even perennial favorites Ecstasy and heroin. Among the college crowd, pigment is quickly replacing Rohypnol in popularity as a date-rape drug (given that recent crackdowns on the latter's distribution make it much harder to procure and much more expensive when available).

So, where does this drug come from? The DEA successfully intercepted several pigment shipments at the border between Mexico and the United States. Thus far, however, no one is certain whether Mexico is the country of origin for the drug or whether it is being produced further south and merely has Mexico as the transit point. Some of our sources within the DEA, however, believe that the recent suspected drug lab in Tijuana, which burned out of control and left 30 people dead was, in fact, producing pigment for sale in the US.

Who is producing the drug? Thus far, both federal and local agencies are stumped as to pigment's producer. They disagree on whether the drug has one single source or several manufacturers. At this point, investigators propose myriad theories with little concrete evidence to support one supposition or discredit another.

Why is the drug being produced? The possibilities posed by this question keep our researchers awake at night. It seems unlikely that a drug with pigment's highly addictive properties would "just happen" to carry additional side effects allowing its users to see the dead. So, if it isn't accidental, then the effect must be intentional. Development of such a drug would require hundreds of man hours and an investment of millions of dollars - and it would require absolute knowledge that ghosts were real, something that, to the best of our knowledge, only Orpheus Group realized as a commercial entity when we went public with that revelation. Yet, pigment has been a street-commodity for two and a half years, regardless the R&D that transpired before that. Why put that sort of effort into creating a specialized drug like pigment and sell it like a common street drug? There must be more to it than what we know, but until we learn more, Orpheus must wait for the proverbial other shoe to drop. Given these lingering questions, Orpheus personnel who encounter pigment users in the field should endeavor to trace the drug back to those dealing it and, from there, to those distributing it (and, finally, to the manufacturer(s)). Bear in mind that the drug allows its users to see disembodied projectors and ghosts; there is some evidence suggesting certain pigment users may also project themselves in the manner of Orpheus skimmers. Therefore, we remind all investigative consultants to proceed with caution during such inquiries.

Status: Gather Intel



audience to pay her attention, and once some ghosts realized she could perceive them, they've paid attention to little else.

Last weekend, Cassandra passed out on the dance floor, only to awaken looking down at her own crumpled form. The out-of-body experience lasted only a few minutes, but as she watched her friends trying to revive her, Cassandra had a vision that her roommate Sarah was being attacked near the university's main library. When she came to, Cassandra immediately called campus security, telling them her friend was being assaulted. That call probably saved Sarah from rape and led to the incarceration of a serial rapist operating in the area for the past year.

Needless to say, campus gossip places the spotlight right on Cassandra, and she loves it. She now equates pigment use with fame and popularity, and it probably won't be long before her drug abuse kills her... and worse.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 2, Empathy 3, Expression 2, Intuition 2, Meditation 2, Occult 1, Performance 1, Stealth 1, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2

Shade: Banshee Lament: Skimmer Nature: Masochist Willpower: 5 Vitality: 6 Spite: 4

Offensive Abilities: Forebode, Wail

LESSERFACTIONS

BROOKS HOUSE

Dr. David Underhill has no connection to the hues of Brooks House, and is in fact ignorant of all things supernatural. He is simply what he appears to be: A man trying to oversee a charitable foundation and help as many people as he can. The true source of the Brooks House infestation is a woman named Mona Evanier, a former counselor. Existing as a spirit since her death, Mona was alarmed by the growing number of hues, and is now trying to gather and help as many lost souls as she can. Although she is primarily motivated by her sense of charity, Mona is also a powerful Banshee, and is equally driven by her concern over the series of visions that show dark and terrible events on the horizon. In addition to hues and the occasional spirit, several people living at Brooks House locations have become projectors as a result of their pigment usage.

THE MIDNIGHT STAR

Michael Sloane is a relatively recent true believer in the paranormal, and he has devoted a small part of his fortune to not only producing scientific proof of its existence, but also to spreading his message to the masses. Unfortunately, Sloane's personal fortune owes more to luck than any sort of genius. By using the Midnight Star as his medium, Sloane has ensured his message will be dismissed by most as tabloid sensationalism and fraud. Still, he soldiers on. The Midnight Star employs roughly three dozen field personnel. Most are journalists (ranging from young idealists to aging cynics), but several are parapsychologists, scientists and self-proclaimed psychics (some of whom are actually projectors). Some ghosts (both spirits and hues), helping Midnight Star reporters, also assist in investigations in exchange for a chance to feel useful or to support their living family.

THE BLACK STEEL CENTIPEDE TRIAD

The Black Steel Centipede Triad is a private empire run by Zong Hong-fu, one of Asia's more feared crime lords. Almost any criminal enterprise or vice that one can conceivably lay at the feet of organized crime, the Black Steel Centipede Triad gladly commits. The triad's operations are well entrenched along the North American West Coast, from Vancouver to Tijuana; it also operates in New York, Boston, Toronto, London and a dozen other major cities. To make matters worse, the triad's leadership consists of several Jason-type Spectres. Several of the group's deadliest enforcers are Jasons, projectors or spite-consumed spirits. See page 267 for more on Spectres.

Lesser Factions

Backgrounds: With the increase in our operations, we at Orpheus Group continue encountering more and more organizations employing, in some capacity, or associating with ghosts and projectors. While the number of groups encountered remains small, we believe they will only continue to proliferate. The following are the three most organized groups we have cataloged outside Terrel & Squib and Next-World.

Brooks House

Threat Tag: Mark Gray

Brooks House is a private charity established in 1988 and managed by the Eleanor Brooks Foundation. One of the wealthier residents of Seattle, Washington, Miss Brooks was renowned for her countless acts of charity and philanthropy. Her will established both the Foundation and the Brooks House charity upon her death. Today, Brooks Houses are found in cities throughout the United States, offering shelter, group counseling, drug treatment and job training for teens and young adults.

Brooks House was the first organization in the country to offer treatment for pigment addiction. We believe this the principle factor in the rather alarming number of hues seen in and around Brooks House locations. Staff members appear unaware of these ghosts, but a small number of House residents noticed both the hues and Orpheus Group operatives investigating the premises. Dr. David Underhill is the present chairman of the Eleanor Brooks Foundation. Investigations into his knowledge or involvement with the Brooks House hue infestation are ongoing.

The Midnight Star

Threat Tag: Mark Green

The Midnight Star is a nationally distributed tabloid headquartered in Miami, Florida. For most of its 20-year publication, the paper has specialized in outrageously unbelievable offerings, including UFO abduction stories, incredibly elaborate conspiracy theories and quarterly "Frog Boy" updates. Most people dismiss the tabloid as a collection of hoaxes, delusions and comic relief.

Three years ago, however, the reclusive and rather eccentric multimillionaire Michael Sloane, purchased the Midnight Star, promptly forcing it to undergo a format change. The paper now undertakes serious investigations into the paranormal, and features well-documented stories on haunted houses, ghost sightings and possessions. Midnight Star reporters have investigated the sites of several recent Orpheus Group operations, and in at least three instances, accompanying the reporters were spooks. Currently, Orpheus Group cannot ascertain whether these entities are projectors or ghosts, nor can we determine Midnight Star's ultimate motives.

Black Steel Centipede Triad

Threat Tag: Foe Red

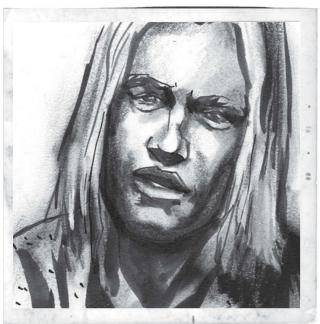
A China-based criminal enterprise, the Black Steel Centipede Triad remains largely a mystery beyond its place of origin. Reports date the organization back to 19th-century Hong Kong, but it is likely their roots are even older still. The triad is involved in all levels of modern organized crime, including prostitution, gambling, forced labor and murder, as well as drug, weapon and illegal immigrant commerce. While the Black Steel Centipedes' stronghold remains Southeast Asia and southern China, the organization's influence and operations have spread across the oceans. Interpol reports widespread investigations of the triad's activities in Europe, Australia, Russia, and both North and South America.

More troubling is that recent Orpheus Group investigations uncovered evidence that the Black Steel Centipede Triad employs ghosts as criminal enforcers. Agents sent to Los Angeles, Las Vegas and New York report encounters with spirits and hues, whereas a team in San Francisco encountered a triad projector. Each of these incidents ended in violence. Because of this, Orpheus Group agents should avoid all unnecessary contact with the triad, and use extreme caution if circumstances require any such interaction.

DANNY TRELANE, BROOKS HOUSE HUE

In junior high school, you wanted to become the next Kurt Cobain. At least you got the junkie part right. Your failed music career drove you deeper into drugs until, finally, you died of a pigment overdose. A group of hues rescued you from existence as a blip and brought you to Brooks House. You aren't driven by any great sense of altruism, but you feel indebted to the people who saved you and you honestly haven't figured out what else to do with your existence yet.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 1, Manipulation 3, Charisma 2, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2



Abilities: Academics 1, Alertness 1, Awareness 2, Computer 1, Drive 1, Empathy 2, Intuition 2, Performance 1, Security 1, Stealth 1, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 2

Shade: Poltergeist Lament: Hue Nature: Dreamer Willpower: 6 Vitality: 7 Spite: 4

Offensive Abilities: Inhabit

AMATEURS AND INDEPENDENTS

The diversity of independent investigators makes generic summaries difficult. Such a character could be anything from a Doctor of Mathematics to a Cherokee medicine man (and could very well be both). Storytellers can take advantage of this diversity to keep players on their toes. For the most part,

Orpheus' assessment of these investigators is accurate. Some professional investigators may actually work for covert government agencies, however, or wealthy eccentrics, or some other group currently unknown to Orpheus. These Death Merchants are more mercenary than curious, though most amateur investigators are typically well-meaning (if clueless). Unfortunately, many become victims or tools of Spectres.

Independent investigators are different from most Orpheus agents. Attribute and Ability levels are comparable to those of Orpheus characters (though experienced investigators usually possess higher Trait ratings). The key difference lies in whether the investigator knows how to project or not. Independent projectors, regardless of their origins or methods, are identical to Orpheus projectors. The only significant difference is that independent supporting characters lack the backing of an organization like Orpheus, and may not possess Orpheus Backgrounds. Storytellers, however, may assign such Backgrounds as she sees fit (granting the Detective License background, for example). Normal human investigators are like every other person, and have no Shade, Lament, Horrors or Stains.

OPTIONAL RULE: PSYCHICS

Orpheus does not deal with any paranormal abilities beyond those of ghosts and projectors. Psychic abilities are a staple of the ghost story genre, however, and Storytellers may wish to incorporate such powers into their chronicles. With that in mind, the following guidelines use Horrors to represent psychic powers: Helter-Skelter for telekinesis, Forbode for pre- and post-cognition, Unearthly Repose for empathic projection, Puppetry for mind control, Inhabit for electrokinesis, Witch's Nimbus for pyrokinesis and Juggernaut for mind-over-matter. Dead-Eyes can also represent second sight. We recommend the Storyteller reserve psychic abilities as a plot device for supporting characters. If a psychic learns to project, he becomes a projector and not a psychic projector. Instead of using Vitality, psychic powers should treat the Vitality needed to power the effect as its level. Therefore, if a psychic has level two in Helter Skelter, it translates as a two Vitality effect in that Horror. Additionally, the look of the power changes with a psychic. Someone using Puppetry doesn't enter the target's body, though line-of-sight or maybe contact is required. Same with Inhabit.

DR. ANDREW CARNAHI

Andrew's interest in the paranormal dates back to his childhood near-death experience, an event that drove him to spend the last few years trying to unlock the secrets of "the other side." Encounters with frauds left him wary of potential hoaxes. His mind is now a well-honed machine, using logic and science to eliminate all impossibilities until only the truth, no matter how improbable, remains.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Amateurs and Independents Threat Tag: Mark Green

Background: In the course of our operations, we sometimes encounter independent operatives who share one or more of our goals. While many such investigators have a sense of curiosity outpacing their skill and ability, a growing number of independent agents possess the experience and talent to successfully carry out their private missions.

The typical amateur investigator is someone best described as "a true believer," and is a fervent adherent to one or more paranormal or pseudoscientific belief systems. These beliefs include, but are not limited to, psychic abilities, alien abductions and New Age mysticism. This is often accompanied by belief in one or more theories involving government or corporate conspiracies. Such investigators frequently interpret all paranormal phenomena through the lens of their pet theories, even to the point of ignoring information that might conflict with their beliefs. As a result, these investigators often misjudge situations and refuse to work with people who don't share their ideology. This makes them a potential danger to themselves and others. In contrast, more professional, independent investigators tend toward skepticism and guarded open-mindedness. Such individuals frequently possess a highly structured world view. While many are trained scientists or engineers, some use a similar framework available in religion or certain mystical belief systems. Some investigators even adhere to both scientific and religious world views (contrary to popular misconception, these two outlooks are not mutually exclusive). A typical investigation by such individuals begins by eliminating all possible mundane causes for the suspected paranormal activity.

If this process of elimination leaves a ghost as the only logical conclusion as the catalyst for events, the investigator conducts the inquiry with the same diligence as Orpheus, using whatever tools are his disposal to settle the issue. Unfortunately, these professional investigators often look down on Orpheus personnel, believing us more concerned with profit and publicity than with actual paranormal research.

While simple curiosity motivates many independent investigators, both amateur and professional, more and more appear driven by a need to understand and come to terms with paranormal and death-related events affecting them personally. These investigators have firsthand experience with ghosts, or have undergone one or more near death experiences and now seek the truth behind such occurrences. In this quest to find answers, many turn to biofeedback, sensory deprivation, shamanic rituals and other techniques we at Orpheus used to develop the projector program. Others turn to pigment (see attached file), tying their own personal investigations into studies of the designer drug and its effects. As a result, several investigators have replicated our work and developed the ability to project.

Independent investigators lack any sort of overall structure; there are currently no individuals who hold any meaningful influence over the subculture. Certain individuals, however, have distinguished themselves to Orpheus personnel in one way or another. Retired surgeon Dr. Stephen Cross of New York, psychology student Heather Corbin of Vancouver and folklorist Prof. Lorna Felton of London are all competent and trustworthy investigators. In contrast, individuals like Eric Gooseman, webmaster for ghostchasers. net, and self-proclaimed cult expert Hillary van Tiffen are rank amateurs with an overinflated sense of self-worth. Agents should avoid the latter camp at all costs. Status: Gather Intel; Recruit if Feasible



Abilities: Academics 3, Computers 2, Enigmas 4, Firearms 1, Investigation 3, Linguistics 3, Medicine 2, Occult 2, Science 4, Technology 3

Nature: Scientist Willpower: 7

Equipment: Kirlian goggles, wide range of portable sensors and technical gear, 9mm pistol.

DEVON MCCOY

Until recently, Devon was a skimmer working for Terrel & Squib for a six-figure salary and spectacular benefits. Then he became involved with the Long Island fiasco (see Hyde, p. 274) and decided it was time for a career move. Although the incident nearly killed him, one good thing did come of the whole affair — Devon discovered he no longer needed Terrel & Squib's drugs to project.

Devon seized the opportunity to resign from the pharmaceutical firm during his recovery, deciding to go into business for himself and thereby share none of his accrued profits. Unfortunately, without Terrel & Squib's or Orpheus' name and the rep that comes with it, Devon discovered that the rich, high-profile clientele to which he was accustomed were not interested in hiring a virtual unknown to handle their cases. Work evaporated, and there was no way he was crawling back to T&S only to die on another of its "cakewalk" missions.

After several days of scheming, Devon finally hit upon a solution. He'd engineer his own hauntings of folks' homes or businesses, and then conveniently show up to deal with these phenomena — for a substantial fee — in his role as a "Paranormal Investigator." Although unable to charge the same fees as T&S, he is also assured of his own safety since he is the source of mischief with which he deals.

Thus far, few of Devon's clients have formally complained to the authorities concerning their suspicions as to his criminal activities. Most never realize someone pulled a scam on them (the haunting is *real*, after all), while the majority of those harboring such suspicions are too embarrassed

at having been duped to come forward. Terrel & Squib, however, is aware of the rogue skimmer's activities and realize his grifts may negatively impact public perception of its activities. In fact, it was Terrel & Squib that brought Devon to Orpheus's attention. After all, why should T&S deal with the mess and bad publicity generated by a former employee when the ever-altruistic Orpheus Group will feel obligated to waste its own manpower and resources doing so (while remaining silent to protect its own assets).

CURRENT STATUS

Devon is running his haunting scam in various small towns throughout the state. He has no set base of operations, instead either establishing a temporary office in a local strip mall or operating right out of his gadget-packed Astrovan (with the exception of his satellite-TV system, all these gadgets are for show.) If Devon continues with his activities for much longer, someone's bound to find him out. If that happens, the media would have a field day, claiming groups like Terrel & Squib and the Orpheus Group are also staging their hauntings to bilk clients. Although there's absolutely no proof if this is true, the court of public opinion has never needed much evidence before passing judgment.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Academics 1, Alertness 1, Awareness 1, Empathy 2, Enigmas 1, Firearms 1, Intuition 2, Investigation 1, Law 1, Linguistics 2, Meditation 1, Occult 1, Stealth 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 3

Shade: Haunter Lament: Skimmer Nature: Trickster Willpower: 6 Vitality: 7 Spite: 4

Offensive Abilities: Helter Skelter, Inhabit



Devon McCoy Threat Tag: Foe Green

Background: Devon McCoy (AKA David McKay, AKA Darrel Hughes, AKA Don McCoy) is one of the greatest threats Orpheus Group currently faces. Unlike the typical and daily dangers confronting Orpheus projectors — uncooperative ghosts, Spectres, etc. — dangers for which they trained, Mr. McCoy is a threat because of what he represents... and what he represents is

a trend that may potentially herald the downfall of our industry.

Devon McCoy makes his living conning innocent people out of their hardearned money — hardly a new activity and nothing that would normally concern us at Orpheus. McCoy, however, puts a new spin on the confidence game. He's a projector, and he, much like our own projectors, investigates ghostly phenomena and eliminates potential threats for his clients, mostly middle-class, white-collar types. Unlike our personnel, however, and unbeknownst to his clientele, McCoy is also the source of those very phenomena.

McCoy's modus operandi is straightforward. He finds a potential victim, or mark, and "haunts" that person's home or place of business, using his abilities as a projector to provide the authentic haunting experience with which Orpheus employees are so familiar. Then, McCoy conveniently sets up shop in town, distributing cards and fliers throughout the area advertising his services as an "investigator of the paranormal." The desperate victims of McCoy's bogus hauntings typically seek him out for help, which he gladly supplies for an ample fee. Soon after, the paranormal phenomena stops, McCoy collects his money and he moves on to a new town and a new mark. What makes Mr. McCoy so dangerous isn't his ruthlessness or his power, but his tactics. Were his operation revealed to the general public, people would question Orpheus' legitimacy. Although we operate a genuine business, handling the client's needs as they pertain to the spirit world, we would be hard pressed to prove that in a court of law without revealing the full extent of projectors' powers — which may themselves cause a backlash of paranoid speculation about our ethics. The Orpheus Group relies on the public's trust (or, at the very least, marginal acceptance) to operate. We worked very hard to silence the skeptics and media pundits who wanted to debunk our work, and a case such as this is exactly what they need to repair their own damaged credibility and crucify us in the process.

To eliminate this threat, Orpheus projectors should investigate any paranormal activity matching Devon McCoy's standard MO. If agents discover he is indeed involved, we ask that Orpheus employees make every effort to subdue and/or capture this criminal and return with him to Orpheus proper. We will make every effort to rehabilitate McCoy and bring him on board as the newest member of the Orpheus team.

If Orpheus and McCoy are unable to reach a solution amicable to both parties, we may need more drastic measures. This is a last resort, however, since successful projectors are a commodity in short supply, and it would be a shame to waste such a potentially valuable resource by incarcerating him. Although we do not believe McCoy to be dangerous, we urge caution in dealing with him; he is well trained in his gifts as a projector and could prove quite dangerous if threatened. Be on guard, and stay sharp.

Status: Retrieval

APPENDIX: GHOST STORIES

Rafkin: There are ghosts in the basement!

Maggie: This basement?

Rafkin: Of course this basement! What is it with you people? If it was the basement next

door I wouldn't give a shit, would I?

- Thirteen Ghosts

ATM Machine: Feed me a stray cat.

- American Psycho

Time to play the game. A series of missions written as Orpheus case files fill this Appendix. Storytellers may copy and distribute sections to their players in the form of in-game briefings. The missions make a strong starting point for a game session, but Storytellers must decide on the actual details behind these missions. Are the details in the files accurate? Are things as they appear or is something else happening behind the scenes? Orpheus investigated each matter to a great enough extent to discover the information for the case file. A Storyteller, however, may involve the characters in the events before the briefings, either observing or experiencing the incidents firsthand.

Like most organizations, Orpheus keeps its files in a standard format. First, each Mission receives a Mission #. During briefings, Orpheus uses the numbers to refer to open and closed operations. Instead of asking an agent about the Haunting of the Randolph building, Orpheus requests an update on Mission #0568. Using numbers keeps information secure for Orpheus while adding to the game's atmosphere of secrecy. Mission numbers also proceed in chronological order. Therefore, if someone mentions Mission #009, agents should realize the assignment was one of the first missions Orpheus undertook. By having an early mission remain open, a Storyteller can create dramatic tension.

Chapter Five details the criteria Orpheus uses to assign a Mission Type. Intel Missions involve gathering information using real worldsources. During Intelligence Gathering missions, agents must call upon supernatural resources to investigate an event. Retrieval missions require the location and collection of something valuable. Sabotage missions direct operatives in espionage activities against rival groups. Removal missions move a subject from a specific location without killing them. This may involve kidnapping or issuing someone a friendly warning to leave. The most important aspect of a Removal mission is the target's survival. Finally, if Orpheus wants a target destroyed, then they assign a Fumigation mission. Missions may have more than one type.

Location Name gives operatives a physical location where the mission should begin. Not all missions remain in a single locale. Agents should follow their assignment to completion wherever it may lead. On rarely does Location Name identify an individual target.

The Background section gives agents the pertinent information behind the operation. This includes a brief account of events leading up to the mission as well as detailing the physical location and any relevant history about the location. It may also contain warnings regarding any hazards (like rotten floorboards or guard dogs).

The Mission Parameters are the In-Character rules of engagement for the operation. It informs agents of the operation's objectives and how far they can go in completing their mission. This section may set a deadline for completion, and may include recommendations and secondary objectives. Orpheus expects experienced field agents to pursue matters according to the situation, even though operatives must justify any operations involving activities beyond the set mission parameters. Violating these parameters is a serious offense and almost always results in disciplinary action, if only as a formality. Orpheus does not fully disclose the mission parameters to clients, though the client may request certain considerations (like "don't frighten the tenants" or "don't let anyone see you").

Intel provides agents with information verified by Orpheus operatives and researchers. Intel is generally of a secret nature

and may discuss supernatural phenomena or events unknown outside the agency. This includes information like a ghost's classification and potential powers, or secret resources, like double agents. Orpheus does not share Intel with clients.

Orpheus' enemies receive *Threat Tags*, which are described in Chapter Five (see p. 265).

Additional Information provides potentially relevant data with no proven direct link to the assignment or information that simply didn't fit elsewhere. This section may contain Intel from similar operations or events involving related opposition. Orpheus includes additional parameters and directives as well in this section. Many agents find that this section gives them the necessary ammunition to justify extreme actions during post-mission inquiries.

Storytellers may modify any of the information herein to fit their chronicle, whether by changing names and places to fit a specific city, or by altering the nature of the threat to keep players guessing. Players may want to complete a final report on each mission using the format listed above, keeping them for posterity's sake and accruing additional experience points (Storyteller's prerogative). A series of mission reports would help players and Storyteller remember details and provide good story opportunities for the future when characters must revisit old files for a new situation. Players should strongly consider not reading these missions without Storyteller approval. It's much more fun to experience missions rather than read them.

MISSION#0766

MISSION TYPE: INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

Ascertain fate of missing Orpheus agents.

Location Name: St. Genesius Cultural Center

BACKGROUND

St. Genesius Cultural Center was, at one point, a convent school (1945-1976). It closed in 1976 after funding ran out and enrollment dwindled, and the building stood empty for nearly a decade. In 1985, Patricia Tanner and her husband, then-city councilman Martin Tanner, purchased the building and began renovations. Their plan was to turn it into a cultural haven for the city—allowing for community theatrical events, independent label concerts, etc. Renovation costs were in the tens of millions, and though the Tanner family was wealthy, they could not shoulder the financial burden alone. They held fund-raising dinners and solicited donations from every big business in the state, but even so, volunteers completed most of the work on the building. With the various delays, it was four more years until the Center was ready to hold its first event. In June 1989, St. Genesius opened its doors to the public for a city-sponsored production of Noel Coward's Blithe Spirit.

The Center was a success for several years, but in 1994, Patricia Tanner died (natural causes) and Martin, never an enthusiastic supporter of the arts himself, focused more on bringing industry to the city. The Center came under fire several times from groups hoping to change the name (a "St. Genesius" center funded by the state in any capacity smacked of a church and state connection), and in 1997, the Center held one last fund-raiser



to survive another season. The show — a Halloween night production of *MacBeth* — drew the biggest crowd the Center had seen, but the show stopped at intermission. Evidently, the actress playing Lady MacBeth disappeared after stepping outside for a cigarette. The Center closed the following weekend.

Over the ensuing years, St. Genesius was battered by a barrage of rumors. The neighborhood became run down and crime-ridden, and most of the local residents believe the place haunted. Books and "reality" TV shows featured the center several times, and though there are many reports of noises, flashing lights and other classic haunting activities, investigators never found proof of these allegations. Six weeks ago, an independent contractor purchased the land and planned to raze the Center, but after two workers disappeared on site, the contractor approached Orpheus about investigating St. Genesius.

Orpheus sent four agents to investigate (two sleepers — Elise Motts and George Hansen; one skimmer — Thomas Ulrich; one photographer — Benjamin Savoy). They entered the Center together, Savoy and Ulrich "solid," Motts and Hansen as ghosts. Ten minutes later, back at Orpheus, both Motts and Hansen's bodies suddenly shook and the equipment keeping them in stasis began malfunctioning. Orpheus began the revival process, but it was clear something was wrong; Orpheus contacted Ulrich through his cellular, and Ulrich left his body. He went in as a ghost to find Motts and Hansen while Savoy waited. Again, ten minutes later, Ulrich's body went into convulsions. Savoy reports that Ulrich's flesh became ice-cold to the touch and his pulse dropped dramatically. This lasted for approximately 30 seconds, after which Ulrich died.

No contact with Ulrich, Motts or Hansen has been possible since, and although Savoy survived, he saw something that terrified him beyond reason. He remains rational, but refuses to go back to St. Genesius for any reason. When questioned, he refers to a "woman in white" before mumbling incoherently.

The obvious assumption is that this "woman in white" is the spirit of the actress who played Lady MacBeth, since the Center had no history of paranormal activity prior to that. The actress (Regina White, b. 1970, declared legally dead 2002) was a local; her family still lives in the area, but has thus far declined interview.

St. Genesius consists of one large building and a smaller one that once housed a chapel. The first floor of the main building holds classrooms and the theater itself (seating 1,000 people). The basement holds old set materials, dressing rooms, a scene shop and storage (the basement is where most of the classic haunting activity has occurred). The second floor holds small bedrooms that once housed students, and were used as offices during the Center's heyday as a theater. The third floor consists of very small, narrow hallways leading above the stage and onto catwalks (used to hang lights and curtains), as well as a light and sound booth.

MISSIONPARAMETERS

Obviously, the primary objective is determining Ulrich's, Motts' and Hansen's fates. Determine if they still exist and whether they can be salvaged (Ulrich's body is dead; we couldn't save it, but we can still conceivably return Motts and Hansen to their bodies). Also, determine the nature of the "woman in

white" and any other spiritual entities in the Center. Assume any ghosts you see are hostile, and use *extreme* caution when investigating the area. Under no circumstances should your crucible split up; remain together at all times. This will slow down the investigation, but will also ensure greater safety.

When you have ascertained the fate of our agents, deliver them to the facility for debriefing and any aid we can provide. At this time, *no action* against spiritual entities is warranted or necessary; the client retained Orpheus Group to investigate, not fumigate the premises. There is no need to risk yourselves unnecessarily.

INTEL

Most of the information we have is provided above. Investigation into Regina White's missing persons report might prove useful, as might conversation with her living family (though as mentioned, they have thus far refused comment — they are deeply religious and do not believe in ghosts). Savoy might still have information, but has not provided any coherent answers about the incident.

When investigating St. Genesius, be aware the building is in need of serious repair. The electricity works, but intermittently, and the flooring and walls are weak and crumbling. The building is dangerous enough without adding ghosts; if you plan on sending in a "solid" agent, use extreme caution.

Threat Tag: Enigma-class; Red

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

While we have no paranormal activity reported at the Center prior to 1997, it bears noting that the building sat empty for nine years and we have no information on what may have transpired during that time (in fact, even records concerning the building's proprietor in that period have proven impossible to track down; the assumption is that the city owned the property and simply didn't develop it). Martin Tanner is probably the most knowledgeable person alive with regards to the Center; he is currently retired and living in his family home (address in attached packet). While Tanner is a businessman and not given to belief in the supernatural, he has on occasion consented to interviews about the Center and, so, might be of some help.

Saint Genesius is the patron saint of thieves, sinners and actors. Why the convent's founding nuns chose him is unknown.

MISSION#0767

MISSION TYPE: INFORMATION GATHERING/RETRIEVAL

Investigate the wreck sites of the Deep Harvest and United.

Location Name: Wreck site of the experimental vessel

Deep Harvest

BACKGROUND

The Tethys Corporation has led the way in deep-sea exploration in the recent decade. They have a sterling international reputation for developing technologies that allow man to probe the ocean depths. Last year, the company announced the development and testing of a new type of DSV,

the Deep Harvest, which would allow scientists and explorers to venture deeper and longer than ever before.

Unfortunately, the Tethys Corporation lost much of their research grants and government funding, due to an administration decision to shift the emphasis on exploration to ROVs, remote operated vehicles, which are smaller and safer than submersibles. In addition, Tethys endured three recalls of undersea devices within the last year. Pressure to complete the Deep Harvest project pushed the board of directors to test 16 months ahead of schedule.

Michelle Anderson, 33, was the pilot of the three-man test vessel. Her crew consists of Dr. Hamid Faraaj, 29, and Stephen Winters, 25. All three were experienced deep-sea oceanographers. According to Tethys records, the Deep Harvest passed all initial tests. Dr. Robert Weinstein, director of the project, made several statements to the effect that while he felt the project was being pushed to its limits, Tethys took no shortcuts with regard to safety.

The Deep Harvest received its first open sea test in relatively shallow waters near the wreck site of an early 20th-century steamer, the United. The United sank for unknown reasons in 1907, claiming three lives in the wreck: Captain Isaac Williams, a passenger named Constance Lee, and an unidentified stowaway. The wreck is of little historical interest since several examples of that particular class still survive. According to all reports, the crew emptied the ship's safe before consigning her to the deep. As a result, treasure hunters have ignored the wreck.

During Deep Harvest's descent to the wreck site, Captain Anderson reported all systems functioning at peak capacity. Once the vessel reached the wreck site, exploration proceeded apace. The log records from the Tethys Corporation show the Deep Harvest performing perfectly. At 31:22 hours into the mission, Dr. Faraaj reported unusual visual contacts emanating from the wreck of the United. Deep Harvest's side-scan, digital scanning and narrow beam sonar readouts showed no contacts. At 32:17 hours, the in-sub microphones picked up a voice saying "set me free." The identity of the speaker is unknown. A safety tether attached to the vessel failed for reasons not fully understood by Tethys, but is currently being ascribed to mechanical failure. A second tether to the tow ship also disengaged from the vehicle at the same time, under similar circumstances. The crew of the Deep Harvest had no means of releasing the tethers. Surface ships monitoring the Deep Harvest noted a change in heading, followed by an apparent attempt to surface. A towed sonar array registered a detonation within the Deep Harvest, and the vessel came to rest on the sea floor. Rescuers launched an automated rescue vessel, the Manatee (designed to grab Deep Harvest so the support ships could tow it to the surface). The surface ships lost contact with the Manatee as it approached the wreck. Using the tow tethers on the Manatee, the surface team retrieved the vehicle. The Manatee's computer systems showed considerable physical damage, although Tethys was unable to identify a possible source.

Rescuers made several attempts to approach the wreck site. Four divers, including an ex-Navy SEAL, were unable to complete the dive. They reported seeing lights and suffering from effects similar to nitrogen narcosis. Citing safety concerns due to rapidly deteriorating weather conditions, Dr. Weinstein and the Tethys Corporation called off the rescue operation.

Tethys Corporation made three further attempts to retrieve the test vehicle, including one launched in conjunction with the U.S. Coast Guard and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. All attempts resulted in failure. All divers and vehicle crew who approached the wreck site suffered visual and auditory hallucinations and reported instrument failure.

For the Tethys Corporation, retrieval of the Deep Harvest is of paramount importance. Rival groups offered to salvage the experimental vessel while the families of the Deep Harvest crew filed negligence lawsuits against the Tethys Corporation. The Deep Harvest incident is an unmitigated disaster.

The Tethys Corporation offered their staff and the research vessel, North Star, to deliver a team to the wreck site. Although it is not public knowledge, they believe that a supernatural presence brought about the failure of the Deep Harvest mission. They request the removal of any hostile supernatural entities, and/or the retrieval of the crew's bodies, a cabin log device (a black box similar to those in aircraft) and a removable portion of the engine marked "EN-14", roughly the size of a dresser drawer.

The Deep Harvest is a small, three-man submarine about thirty feet long, with a main cabin, two small sleep bays and an engine room. Entry is possible through a hatch on the top side. According to Tethys, the Deep Harvest currently rests on its port side, with a large hole on the starboard side of the engine room facing the surface.

The United was a 560 foot steamer, roughly 63 feet wide with steam triple expansion engines and twin screws. It has two large stacks each approximately a third of the way from the stern or the aft. The vessel could carry 1740 passengers, 540 first class, 200 second class and 1000 third class. It was operated by American Line when it went down. Similar vessels include the Paris, Philadelphia, Harrisburg and Yale. The sinking of the United was a disappointment to American Line, but with little loss of life, few records remain specifically on the vessel.

MISSIONPARAMETERS

The team should expect hostile contact with unknown entities, though we're currently unsure if the ghosts are the three people who died aboard the United. By our current estimations, there are no ghosts older than three years. If the United's victims still persist, they represent the oldest ghosts currently documented. The primary mission objective, however, is to remove the ghosts or negotiate with them to allow Tethys to retrieve the Deep Harvest. Due to the dangers posed by the underwater environment, all agents should project from a surface vessel or another safe location. Agents should venture underwater physically only if they have appropriate training or feel it absolutely necessary to protect fellow Orpheus agents. When working with Tethys members, all agents may share information on a need to know basis only. In matters relating to ocean safety, Orpheus agents should defer to the expertise of Tethys personnel. Orpheus security personnel will travel with the team to serve as guards for the projectors' bodies. As a secondary objective, agents should return with as much intel as possible about the site for potential future operations.

INTEL

Captain Isaac Williams was romantically involved with Constance Lee. The two were to be married May of 1908.

Based on historical documents, Captain Williams may have gone down with his ship, and Constance Lee may have stayed with him out of love or loyalty. He could also have forced her to remain on board.

Captain Williams had a reputation for smuggling illegal immigrants into the United States. He was arrested five years before the wreck for involvement in a smuggling operation. It is likely, based on the level of supernatural activity, that he had not one, but several stowaways in the hold — probably illegal immigrants from Europe.

Background checks on Deep Harvest's crew show nothing unusual in regards to Michelle Anderson or Stephen Winters. Dr. Hamid Faraaj had an interest in the occult, but we believe this was limited to the occasional Ouija session, Tarot reading or research book for his library. Nothing indicates the Deep Harvest's crew purposely triggered the incident.

Threat Tag: Enigma-class Green

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Tethys Corporation stands on the brink of financial ruin. As a result, they may take extra risks to ensure the success of the retrieval operation. The box labeled "EN-14" contains nuclear material. Handle with extreme caution, but please note that the hazard comes from radiation leakage. There is no danger of an explosion.

Research shows that several ships traveling in the vicinity of the United wreck experienced mysterious instrumentation failures over the years. All of these accounts were discounted as sea-faring anomalies.

MISSION#0768

MISSION TYPE: INTELLIGENCE GATHERING/FUMIGATION

Intelligence Gathering on possible ghost presence, fumigation if necessary.

Location Name: Southville Town Gazette

BACKGROUND

The location is the print works for the Southville Town Gazette, situated directly beneath the Gazette's offices, in a converted 19th-century building just outside the city. The Gazette distributes copies daily to subscribers throughout town. They also send the weekend edition to expatriated subscribers, mostly people who left for college or the army. Since Southville is a reasonably small community, the daily edition is 3,000 copies, and the weekend 3,500 copies. Editor is Mr. Jonathan Lewing (56), and the Gazette is largely self-financing, with some support from the local town council and churches.

Three days ago, Ms. Sue Reynolds (Michigan State University, 19) received a copy of the weekend supplement, and noticed that an insert (for services at the local Episcopalian church, St. Matthew's) was printed in reddish-brown ink. Chemical analysis revealed this to be blood. Forensics showed the insert could only have been added at source (Ms. Reynolds has been reassured that it was the work of a student prankster).

The Gazette claims there was no such insert. Examination of past Gazette issues, however, revealed that that particular insert was standard practice. Also, within the last week, the print job was apparently reset partway through on two separate occasions, on direct orders from the editor (no direct information as to why.) A higher than usual number of misprints has also occurred, according to Ms. Martha Davenport (89), who was most useful in providing local gossip. She also believes this is due to alien infestation, but seems reliable enough otherwise.

Further investigation reveals at least three severe accidents within the last couple of months (Mrs. Marjorie Ennis, crushing injury to hand while cleaning printer; Mr. David Stanwell, broken leg in fall from stepladder; Mr. John Clement, head injury and concussion after shelf came loose) and the deaths of two staff members (Mr. Lewis Panning, a month ago, and Ms. Virginie Coulter, two weeks ago, both at home, separately; both of heart attacks). There are also other cases of minor injury or accidents. While all these incidents are ordinary in appearance, the clustering is statistically abnormal.

Apparently an atmosphere of low-grade fear is current at the Gazette offices. While the editor publicly disclaims "superstitious nonsense" (and thus ensured everyone knows something strange is happening), most of the staff believe something abnormal is occurring. Popular opinion is 50% in favor of haunting, 30% in favor of FBI involvement to suppress a regular column about Communist infiltration of the movie industry and 20% in favor of rational thinking, i.e., that it's merely a run of accidents. Ms. Josette Bailey (49), secretary to the editor, is the leader of the last faction and may provide a useful contact.

Witnesses have seen Mr. Jon Faith (38), the Gazette's current lead reporter, talking with Father Ronald Wells (of the local Catholic church, St. Agnes), but we have no further information on their discussion. It is possible Mr. Faith wants the priest to exorcise the place, since Faith is a proponent of the "it's haunted" theory.

MISSION PARAMETERS

We believe one or more ghosts demonstrating poltergeist-type powers to be present. Observe and monitor, with particular interest in what tethers may be anchoring the ghost(s) there, and what the ghosts' objectives appear to be. Avoid attracting further paranormal investigators, however; the Gazette may have contacts with larger news organs, and we don't want this becoming a media circus.

If the ghost(s) present are of a new and unknown type, try obtaining firsthand data on their abilities and powers. Note that the ghost(s) appears antagonistic to people working at the Gazette, to judge by the accidents, and may be hostile to Orpheus investigators. Due caution is advised. Agents should be careful not to annoy the ghost(s) if regular Gazette workers are present, in case it turns on them.

If Mr. Faith does persuade Father Wells to try an exorcism, attempt to observe the ritual and its outcome, on both physical and nonphysical levels, and determine whether any results are due to the ritual or to Father Wells' personality.

If necessary, fumigate the place of ghosts thoroughly.

Our client is Mr. Reynolds, father of Sue Reynolds (q.v.), with substantial holdings in the motor industry. He wishes his involvement to be kept secret since it could create financial problems with some of his Bible Belt industry contacts. Mr. Reynolds procured permission from the building's lease-holders to investigate the site, but requests you exercise caution with whom you approach.

INTEL

Poltergeist-type powers are among the best-documented in our records; assume that if the accidents are due to a ghost (or even projector) of this type, then there is high physical risk, especially given the dangerous machinery at the Gazette. If the Gazette intends to bring out a particularly important supplement or gains a lucrative advertising contract, these would both attract the attention of a ghost hoping to damage the paper.

It is possible the whole business is a large-scale hoax, intended to build popular support for the Gazette, or is being carried out by someone with a grudge against the editor. In this case, acquire full information on the situation, but do not necessarily release it to the local police or authorities.

Threat Tag: Enigma-class Red

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The recent deaths of Mr. Lewis Panning and Ms. Virginie Coulter are suspicious. Mr. Panning had just resigned from his post, though only 54 and not yet at retirement age (we lack full information why). He is survived by his wife, Mrs. Louise Panning (43) who refuses to discuss her late husband, and whom we suspect was frequently abused by him. She has avoided social contact since and is rarely seen by neighbors. Ms. Coulter was 44 and a cleaning woman at the Gazette. She had a genuine heart condition (Marfan's Syndrome) and her death is not overtly suspicious.

Father Wells has no known experience in performing exorcisms, and has been serving his parish for the last 15 years. We have no way of being certain what effects faith may or may not have on the situation, if indeed a haunting is taking place.

MISSION#0769

MISSION TYPE: RETRIEVAL AND FUMIGATION:

Target Name: Mathew Lehto and unknown ghost accomplices.

Mathew Lehto is a rogue Orpheus agent. Agents should bring him to Orpheus; he is armed and dangerous. Lehto may have accomplices, one or more Mirage-class Red or Shadow-class fumigation targets.

BACKGROUND

Orpheus Group recruited Mathew Lehto three years ago, at the age of 27. Prior to recruitment he attended a prestigious Ivy League university on a need-based scholarship. He worked his way through graduate school with several highly

competitive internships, and left with an MBA in finance. After graduation, Lehto worked as a financial advisor with Morgana Financial, a high-profile investment bank; his first NDE was at the hands of a bank client, who, hit hard by a stock market correction, responded with a shooting spree in the investment office. The incident left Lehto and three staff members critically wounded and two others dead. The falling stock market also cost Lehto his job; his second NDE was self-initiated. The requisite battery of psychological tests for potentially suicidal recruits suggested Lehto's attempted suicide was the result of a situational and temporary depression, and he was cleared for field duties at the completion of his training.

Lehto's tenure with Orpheus Group was unremarkable until six months ago. He progressed through pay grades and clearances at the expected rate, and achieved bonuses for meeting organizational goals in several quarters. Six months ago Lehto's crucible had a violent encounter with an Enigmaclass entity, resulting in the deaths of two agents in the line of duty (see attached files: Raker, Neva; and Ranum, Allan). Orpheus reassigned Lehto and the other two survivors.

In the past four months, Lehto filed referrals for three possible Retrieval missions, accruing the standard referral fee. When questioned about these referrals during the biannual departmental audit, Lehto became evasive; he did not return to work the next day, and has not been seen since by Orpheus personnel. The initial investigation by agents Zeledon and Masterson indicate Lehto was familiar with the families of the three deceased individuals through his college organizations, that he made outside inquiries into the families' financial health prior to the deaths of the deceased, and that Lehto initiated the contact following the deaths of each individual. Medical acquired the coroner's records in each case and determined that ghostly force cannot be ruled out as cause of death.

Important Note: It is very possible that Lehto was not involved in any foul play. He may have predicted these events,



kept his foreknowledge to himself and acted in the aftermath for his own benefit. This is a violation of Orpheus ethical protocols (though a less serious offense than homicide or murder-for-hire). His flight after the departmental audit suggests at least peripheral involvement. Staff psychologists theorize that the Enigma-class encounter brought Lehto's mental instability back to the fore (both events [the first NDE at Morgana Financial and his Enigma-class mission] occurred on the job, both were extremely violent, both took the lives of co-workers); this time his aggression may be directed outward. They caution that Lehto may become self-destructive when cornered.

Because Lehto has an alibi within Orpheus when two of the three victims died (confirmed by both Orpheus staff and security cameras), he must have accomplices if he is directly involved. The Echo- and Mirage-class ghosts in Lehto's official case-load were investigated and cleared, or are confirmed destroyed by other Orpheus personnel. Lehto has the resources and training to rescue and influence any number of ghosts, however; agents are advised to proceed with caution.

MISSIONPARAMETERS

Stage One: Locate Mathew Lehto. Observe target for a period of 24 hours after establishing his location. Record all contacts, human and ghost, for further investigation. Agents should follow and immediately neutralize any Shadow-class contacts once the target moves on, following standard protocols for calling in backup. If opposition proves hostile against agents or bystanders, move immediately to Stage Two.

Stage Two: Bring Mathew Lehto to Orpheus HQ. Any non-living accomplices who interfere with the removal are to be fumigated immediately. You are to capture and detain any living accomplices.

Stage Three: Investigate all contacts in the 24-hour window for possible involvement. It is vital you adhere to proper protocol when investigating human contacts; Orpheus will turn over all relevant information to the appropriate local or federal law enforcement agencies after review by Legal. Any Echo- or Mirage-class Red contacts are to be fumigated. Capture and bring Echo- and Mirage-class Green contacts to HQ for further interrogation if the agents suspect their involvement.

INTEL

Mathew Lehto is a skimmer. This makes him a highly mobile and energetic projector. Agents should expect him to be in good health and operating at full peak unless they witness an energy transfer or Horror manifestation. Lehto is classified as a Banshee, and received Orpheus training in the following Horrors: Forebode, Wail. The members of his previous crucible witnessed his use of the Unearthly Repose Horror; he may have developed additional abilities on personal time.

Mathew Lehto was last seen by local law enforcement dispatched to investigate a missing persons report filed by concerned friends. Lehto spoke with the officers, and the missing persons bulletin is no longer in effect (see attached file: full police report).

The abilities of any potential ghost accomplices are unknown. Agents should consider accomplices hostile, but they are not fumigation targets until they become aggressive, or are observed to be Shadow-class.

Threat Tag: Mirage-class Green (Projector); Mirage-class Red (Ghosts); Shadow-class Red (Spectres)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Mathew Lehto has one surviving parent, his mother (Allison, 67), and two siblings (Deborah, 23, and Alexander, 32). He has not contacted any family member for approximately five years. He made generous donations to his alma mater and attended many alumni functions; he may return to the university or the surrounding area in times of stress.

This matter must be kept internal. In a worst-case scenario, where Lehto is responsible for the deaths of three individuals, the current legal system is completely incapable of prosecuting him effectively. Any attempt to do so would be disastrous for the legal system and highly inconvenient for Orpheus Group.

The search and rescue contracts referred by Lehto are still open. If it becomes impossible to track Lehto down, you may need to re-investigate the three deaths, track down any accomplices and find Lehto through them. If this approach becomes necessary, it is vital the families not be notified that this is anything other than SOP for a search and rescue (see attached files: Missions #0539, #0578, #0634).

MISSION#0770

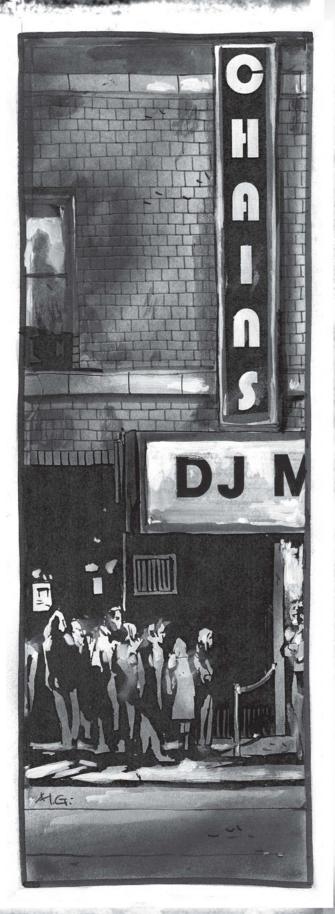
MISSION TYPE: INTELLIGENCE GATHERING/POSSIBLE RETRIEVAL OR FUMIGATION

Investigate ghost sightings at a local "goth" club. Location Name: Chains Nightclub

BACKGROUND

Chains has undergone several name and style changes since opening in 1987. Most recently (late last year), it changed from "Quickies" to "Chains" and adopted a "goth" feel. The club has a reputation for being an easy place to purchase drugs, including marijuana, ecstasy and pigment. The club is open six nights a week (closed Mondays) and sees its largest crowds on Thursdays (college ID night) and Saturdays.

Within the last six months, the club has become famous as the occasional hangout of shock-rock star Jayne Jonestown (late 20s). He arrives on nights when the club is particularly crowded (rumor has it he sends "spotters" to check the club for undercover police and reporters before arriving, since he is a habitual drug user according to unconfirmed reports) and shows up shortly after midnight. He first frequented the club six months ago. Since then, many regulars reported seeing "ghosts" in the club. These descriptions range from smoky, indistinct images of people dancing to three incidents involving actual physical contact (the most dramatic of which involved a glass of vodka that floated off a table and emptied itself onto the floor). You probably already heard about these occurrences; they received fairly extensive media coverage of late (though most of it has been derisive and dismissive). Jonestown, however, is evidently a believer and wishes to uncover the truth. He hired Orpheus to determine the nature of the "Chains' Ghost," with the club's full sanction.



Chains is a very small club and, by law, holds only 250 people. On a busy night, the wait to get in can exceed three hours. On nights when Jonestown arrives, the wait is often more than six. The doorman admits people on the basis of looks, so we recommend dressing the part (see photos). You might also be able to bypass the line by paying off the doorman (Orpheus will, of course, reimburse expenses; see Accounting). Of course, should you enter as ghosts, you need not worry about crowds or lines. Jonestown promised to be present on any night we choose to work, but please remember, he is a celebrity and is therefore "on camera" whenever in public. To wit, recall that he affects a dark, "gothic" persona and makes frequent references to Satanism and drinking blood. Don't be rattled by this performance; Jonestown is simply a (debatably) talented performer, nothing more. He is, however, able to extend aid in the form of ensuring the police are not present (he cannot actually keep them out, but does know when undercover personnel are present), and the club has a "no-media" policy unless warned in advance, so you should be able to work relatively unmolested. Remember, though, that many of Chains' patrons reported being able to see ghosts and we have no idea how many of these sightings are genuine, how many are drug induced and how many are simple lies. Likewise, while the management doesn't let media in knowingly, the presence of a celebrity all but guarantees the attention of paparazzi. Use caution, especially when moving as spooks.

MISSIONPARAMETERS

The club reports no hostile entities, but our client does express interest in clearing any ghosts found at the club. He has not made his reasons clear (and we, of course, did not ask; they are his business). Assess any ghosts you find for threat and then, if possible, remove them from the premises. Anyone going in solid should look the part of a club-goer; we do not want any media exposure here because of the significant drug traffic at Chains.

Also, this mission presents a good opportunity to test the effects of mind-altering substances on a normal person's ability to perceive ghosts. While in the club, attempt to subtly manifest to someone under the influence of a drug (ideally, one that you can recognize) and record their responses. This should provide valuable information that might help us insimilar cases. Pigment, in particular, which has only recently become widely popular, is an unknown quantity with regards to ghost perception, and it is in wide distribution at Chains. If possible, purchase a small amount of the drug so that we might analyze it and test it later (but be *extremely* careful — legal fees are expensive).

INTEL

The "Chains Ghost" seems to be more than one entity and does not appear to be hostile or dangerous. As we've discovered in the past, however, just because a ghost isn't dangerous to humans doesn't mean it can't be. Jonestown, in particular, seems to feel that the ghost (or ghosts) have some grudge against him, but has heretofore been elusive about why. Any connection between him and the club's past would be helpful, but the club changed hands and names so often that tracing its history is difficult. Jonestown claims to have "discovered" the club while on his last tour and it has since become a once-a-month haunt (pardon the pun) for him. He has an almost constant crowd of groupies, but never travels with a bodyguard.

The club employs ten people, excluding the manager/owner, Ahmed Osman. Of those, most are new employees (turnover is high, though we have not determined why, apart from the constant threat of DEA raids). The employee with the longest tenure is the bartender, Mark Chandler. Chandler has arrests for serving drinks to minors, drug trafficking and possession, and statutory rape (evidently involving a seventeen-year-old girl who entered the club with her older sister's ID), but has never been convicted. Chandler is a close acquaintance of Jonestown, and is willing to help with any interviews or investigations you wish to pursue. He knows most of the regular clientele and is adept at spotting undercover reporters and policemen.

Threat Tag: Enigma-class Green

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Normally, a ghost sighting carries with it some legendary account of the ghost's identity. In researching this, however, we found no such account making the rounds throughout local rumor mills. Regardless, there is one strong possibility for identifying the Chains Ghost. A young woman named Nicole "Lily" Warner collapsed at the club slightly over seven months ago. The death was ruled a drug overdose (specifically heroin), but one of her friends (Brian Vest, current whereabouts unknown) insisted she was murdered. No murder investigation ever took place; the investigating pathologist ruled her death accidental and Chains shut down for a month, reopening on the night Jonestown made his first appearance (though he claims to have been there before, incognito).

Nicole Warner was 18 at the time of her death and attended college in the city before dropping out four months before she died. She went by "Lily" because of that flower's association with funerals, and she typically wore a black veil when clubbing. Very few of the club's current clientele remember her, but she is the only person known to have died at the club.

MISSION#NON-APPLICABLE

MISSION TYPE: FUMIGATION

Target Name: Ernesto Hernandez

BACKGROUND

Ernesto Hernandez (45), a pigment user and dealer, started stalking Ms. Alana Blair (44) approximately three months ago. Ms. Blair, a wealthy widow, claims to have met Mr. Hernandez in a nightclub, Inhale. They spoke about business. Mr. Hernandez was looking for investors for Inhale, probably to laundering drug money from pigment sales at the nightclub.

Hernandez was immediately attracted to Ms. Blair. Over the next several weeks, he proclaimed his love for her, sending her gifts and messages. Ms. Blair refused his offers of affection, since her husband died less than a year ago. Mr. Hernandez took the rejection badly and became threatening and violent. Ms. Blair suffered repeated vandalism to her home and her vehicle. She received numerous threats in the form of phone calls and letters. She claims Mr. Hernandez and his buyers stalk her constantly. Authorities investigated, but did no more than issue a restraining order against Mr. Hernandez.



Ernesto Hernandez is a 45-year old Hispanic male with a long criminal record, including manslaughter, possession with intent to distribute, and various conspiracy charges. He has graying dark hair and a distinctive scar that he inflicted upon himself as a youth in apparent admiration of Al Pacino's role in *Scarface*. He is a known pigment addict and is believed to have several men in his employ; he styles himself as the city's drug lord and maintains a residence at 3200 Decatur Estates.

Decatur Estates is a wealthy gated community. Each home is built to order on a large, multi-acre secluded lot. Security systems and walled yards are common within the community. Ernesto Hernandez's home lies on the end of a cul de sac with land bordering an undeveloped wildlife preserve. A kill zone of 100 yards surrounds the house with little cover except for a few pieces of topiary. A group of four attack dogs have full run of the grounds. The house has two levels and a basement with a total of four full bathrooms and ten bedrooms. A long driveway leads to a four-car garage. Mr. Hernandez has a bedroom and study in the basement where he spends most of his time. The upper level is reserved for guests while the rooms on the first floor are for business associates. Five bodyguards live at the house, and a single maid is responsible for the cleaning.

MISSION PARAMETERS

Our mission is to ensure Ernesto Hernandez no longer bothers Ms. Alana Blair. Our client, Ms. Blair, fears for her life. She has produced credible evidence that if action is not taken, Mr. Hernandez will kill her. Agents should take any actions necessary to complete this mission, including otherwise unsanctioned extreme measures. No supernatural opposition is expected, although given the nature of Mr. Hernandez's business, any local pigment users may prove troublesome for projecting or ghostly agents.

As a secondary objective, agents should uncover any information about the pigment trade. We have reason to believe Ms. Blair may be a pigment user, as well as Mr. Hernandez, and that she may have originally purchased pigment from him. Agents are not to investigate Ms. Blair, however. She is our client. Any matters involving her will be handled on a separate brief.

Previous missions suggest pigment may affect a human's ability to perceive spiritual beings. Agents should take the opportunity to record any interaction between Hernandez and his men with any ghosts. If they can perceive ghosts, however, agents should take action to protect their identities.

INTEL

Mr. Hernandez may be responsible for a number of violent crimes, including murder. Authorities questioned him in connection with the disappearances of several women over the last five years, but they never leveled charges against him. His men are heavily armed and will shoot to kill. Hernandez maintains an arsenal of weapons in his home and had a panic room installed in his basement two years ago. Agents should expect to encounter numerous security cameras on the mansion's interior and exterior.

Threat Tag: Foe

MISSION#0771

MISSION TYPE: INTELLIGENCE GATHERING/RETRIEVAL

Intelligence gathering on items with possible links to ghosts, and collection of said items.

Location Name: Past Times Antiques

BACKGROUND

Past Times Antiques has operated for the last 65 years as a normal second-hand shop, reselling cheap antiques. Recently, five potentially supernatural incidents (see below) were traced to or took place near items purchased from this shop. The owner, Ms. Julia Gregson (32), has no overt agenda in selling such items, but has lately tried tracing some previous customers; her behavior may warrant investigation. Items sold and resulting incidents are as follows.

- *One brass statue of Shiva, previous property of Colonel Patrick Asquith, English (deceased); owner (Matthew Darby, 54, shop owner, NRA member) was cleaning gun when "it went off" and shot him in the leg. Still hospitalized.
- * One opal ring, previous owner untraced; sold to Ms. Jane Barlow (34, bookseller) who quarreled with her philandering boyfriend, and then stabbed him. Currently in prison on a murder conviction.
- * One oak rocking chair, 18th century, previous owner unknown. Current owner (Mr. Peter Farrell, 65, retired) states it deliberately broke the leg of one of his cats, and that it rocks at the night when he's in bed.
- * One set of silver cutlery, previous owner Mrs. Joanne Martel (deceased). Current owners (Mr. Kelsey and Mrs. Dolores Parren, both 45) state that the cutlery sweats blood when left alone for more than two days, and needs constant polishing.
- * One silver and amber cigarette lighter, previous owner Mr. Brendan Ledbury (1920s); current owner (Mr. David Peterson, 27, banker) says he is increasingly driven to smoke, that he can't lose the lighter despite several attempts to leave

it behind or throw it away, and that there have been three minor fires in his office building within the last fortnight.

So far we have not traced any other items from the shop that have had such dramatic events associated with them. Mr. Dennis Smith (45), owner of the craft shop next door, complained to Ms. Gregson and to the police about strange noises coming from the back room of her shop late at night. No other neighbors confirmed this story, and the police have not yet investigated.

Our client is Mr. Farrell (q.v. above); he believes he is paying our full rates, though we're actually only charging him half rate since he couldn't afford it otherwise. The items themselves interest us and we need Mr. Farrell as our excuse to investigate.

MISSIONPARAMETERS

Investigate the shop, owner and items being sold, but be careful since we don't have the authority to investigate the location. Ascertain whether any of the above have genuine supernatural significance. If items are somehow supernaturally "tainted," try locating one that's been sold, and either remove them from their current owners or report their location for later examination. Determine if Ms. Gregson is involved in the distribution of such items and gather enough evidence to incriminate her for something else if she is deliberately involved. Talk with Jefferson in Finance about getting her on tax evasion.

INTEL

Ms. Gregson took over ownership of the shop last year after the death of her uncle, the previous owner, who died with no other relatives. She is an aspiring author who previously supported herself by working as a substitute teacher in secondary schools. No criminal record, and no known supernatural affiliations; Catholic, but does not attend church regularly. Her uncle, Jonathan Gregson, was interested in the occult but died of natural causes (brain embolism); he was affiliated with a local spiritualist circle.

Threat Tag: Enigma-class Green

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

It is possible Jonathan Gregson is haunting the place and obsessively guarding "his" antiques; we've seen hoarding behavior like this reported before in other ghosts. In this case, threatening to destroy items present will probably enrage him and draw him out, should this be necessary.

MISSION #0772

MISSION TYPE: ESPIONAGE

Make contact with an Orpheus mole in Terrel & Squib. Target Name: Kelly Michaels

BACKGROUND

Kelly Michaels (26) was an employee of Terrel & Squib who encountered an Orpheus team four months ago as they attempted to access a ghost's memories for a client (see mission file #0643). Ms. Michaels was already disgusted with T&S's cavalier attitudes towards ghosts, and made contact with our agents shortly thereafter. She offered her services to us, originally as an employee (meaning she would leave T&S), but she is more valuable as a mole. Ms. Michaels has been slowly feeding us information ever



since. Another informant within T&S, however, tells us that Ms. Michaels is under investigation and her cover is likely in jeopardy. That in mind, we must contact Ms. Michaels, ascertain if she knows how her cover was blown and if it can be salvaged.

Ms. Michaels is a skimmer. Before joining Terrel & Squib, she worked for a company called Professional Building Services, clearing away hazardous materials and cleaning up after construction crews. Several years ago, she suffered what should have been a fatal case of chemical fume inhalation after working in an enclosed area with toxic cleaning agents, but survived after prolonged hospital treatment (she points to this incident as her "trigger" to see ghosts, though T&S actually trained her to project). She is knowledgeable about industrial practices, particularly with regards to chemicals and acids, and can operate heavy machinery like forklifts. She transmits information to us once a week via the Internet. Usually, the information is pertinent to T&S policy, practice and operations (and has on several occasions allowed us to scoop work out from under Terrel & Squib). She aggressively pursues advancement, in order that she might obtain pure samples of the drugs T&S uses to facilitate projecting.

Last night, something interrupted Ms. Michaels' communication just as she finalized plans for tomorrow's meeting. The interruption in communication is untraceable, and we have no reason to assume it was anything other than a hiccup in transmission (other than the general suspicion associated with this line of work). Obviously, this development puts a certain degree of risk into the mission. Stay in contact at all times, and use extreme caution, especially when moving as spooks. Terrel & Squib has evinced special tactics and equipment against ghosts and projected entities in the past (see Intel).

MISSIONPARAMETERS

You are to make contact with Ms. Michaels at the North Bend Drive-in Theater. The theater has been closed for some time, and is far enough outside any dense population center that you shouldn't run any real risk of being followed. Your meeting is for tomorrow night at 11:00 PM. The last transmission between

Ms. Michaels and Orpheus was interrupted, however, so we do not know if she intends to project or go solid, so you should prepare for both eventualities. Likewise, because of the recent communications difficulty, be prepared for trouble; ensure nobody shadows you to the rendezvous point and have ready and fast transportation waiting. If you even suspect Ms. Michaels cover is broken, take her and return to Orpheus immediately (calling for backup if necessary).

INTEL

Terrel and Squib's usual MO is to send in agents in black hummers, armed with stun guns, small handguns and spooklethal ammo. Likewise, Ms. Michaels' intel indicates they can detect spooks through Kirlian goggles, and may be even able to incarcerate ghosts and projected entities.

If T&S plans to ambush you at the meeting, however, they will no doubt arrive ahead of time. Preliminary intelligence at the site reports no unusual activity, though T&S is not know for initiating well thought-out plans (they tend to show up and improvise). This makes the mission doubly dangerous, since we have no idea of how much "safe time" you have upon contacting Ms. Michaels. If you feel it necessary to take Ms. Michaels to a safer location once the meeting begins, do so.

Threat Tag: Collaborator Blue (Ms. Michaels), Contender Green (T&S Agents)

Approach Ms. Michaels as an Orpheus agent, but there's always the possibility her loyalties have returned to T&S. If this proves the case, capture her. The 1996 Economic Espionage Act is quite clear in matters involving corporate intelligence, and Orpheus cannot afford any potential backlash in this matter. If this proves impossible, inform Orpheus of the situation immediately, and evacuate the area (if she has turned, it is likely the meeting is an ambush).

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MISSION TYPE: FUMIGATION

Locate and eliminate target.

Target Name: Ms. Serena Prezioso

BACKGROUND

Ms. Prezioso was the victim of botched plastic surgery. On April 19th of last year, she arrived at the office of Dr. Allan Stumpf for an elective liposuction procedure. Dr. Stumpf possessed only minimal training in the procedure and was not board-certified. There is also significant evidence that Dr. Stumpf was mildly impaired by alcohol on the afternoon of the surgery. During the procedure, Dr. Stumpf removed approximately fifteen pounds of fat from Ms. Prezioso's thighs, stomach and buttocks, in the process rupturing multiple blood vessels. Ms. Prezioso bled to death on the operating table while Dr. Stumpf argued with his staff over calling for an ambulance.

Dr. Stumpf's medical license was suspended on April 24th and revoked on June 13th. He was found dead in his home on June 18th. Authorities ruled his death a suicide by self-inflicted gunshot wound. At this time, his death is not included within the scope of this case.

Between May 1 stand now, administrators at Memorial Hospital, a facility specializing in care for the mentally ill, recorded eleven admissions of young women for self-mutilation (local emergency rooms, where the injuries were initially treated, referred all eleven

cases). All eleven women were young, physically fit and generally attractive. All cut themselves on the thighs and stomach with sharp implements. Most of these patients had no recollection of the incident or its immediate aftermath, but three recounted to Memorial staff that they felt compelled by some outside force to inflict the wounds on their bodies. Memorial Hospital contacted Orpheus for assistance.

Agents Kinghorn and Bohman conducted the initial intelligence gathering. They established the depth, angle and pattern of the slashes, which indicated they were both "self-inflicted" yet all inflicted by the same entity (within wide tolerances made necessary by the variety of sharp implements used in the assaults). They also discovered three additional attacks that resulted in the deaths of the victims, and accordingly were not classified as mental illness (though the Coroner's office did discern the wounds were self-inflicted). The agents investigated several violently disfiguring and untimely deaths within the appropriate time frame, including that of Ms. Prezioso. They also confirm Ms. Prezioso's continued existence by an initial visual sighting. Agents Kinghorn and Bohman followed standard investigative procedure and withdrew when spotted since no lives were in immediate jeopardy.

MISSIONPARAMETERS

Fumigate Ms. Serena Prezioso's ghost. Time is vital; Ms. Prezioso represents a serious and continuing threat to the living.

INTEL

We believe Ms. Prezioso is a Skinrider. This is not confirmed; agents Kinghorn and Bohman did not observe her manifestation or the use of any Horrors. Agents located Ms. Prezioso in the operating room where she died. She also left signs of her presence in the condo where she lived, and in the gymnasium located within the same apartment complex. Ms. Prezioso's victims were within a ten-mile radius of her place of death (an area which includes her prior residence) when they hurt or killed themselves, were between the ages of 16 and 28, and were attractive and physically fit.

Threat Tag: Echo or Mirage-class Red, or Shadow-class Red

Ms. Prezioso is a high-threat target. Her violent acts have, to this point, specifically targeted victims who remind her of herself, but she will undoubtedly retaliate when she senses a threat. Any female agents assigned to this mission should be especially vigilant.

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MISSION TYPE: RETRIEVAL/ FUMIGATION

Investigate Magnox Computers, determine nature of haunting, capture or destroy ghosts present.

Location Name: Magnox Computers

BACKGROUND

Three weeks ago, Sean Davies (32), a security guard for Magnox Computers, shot two men, and then himself, during his night shift; FBI agent Kevin Nankets (44), and freelance computer programmer Hubert Keith (27). This took place at Magnox Computers, in the office that Mr. Keith used. Since then, staff members report random poltergeist activity occurring throughout that floor of the building and strange screams late at night; police officers sent in to investigate were all killed.

The officers consisted of four trained policemen, all of whom died within the space of ten minutes. One suffered a cardiac arrest, despite no medical evidence of heart disease. One threw himself, or was thrown, through a window on that floor (the seventh) and broke his neck. The third was beaten around the head and body with a computer terminal, and died from ruptured internal organs. The fourth was electrocuted though no where near any electric outlets or appliances.

The motivation for Davies' double murder/suicide is not yet clear. Information suggests Hubert Keith and Sean Davies were having an affair, and that Sean Davies grew insanely jealous of Kevin Nankets' interest in his lover (whether or not this was justified). Hubert Keith is described as manic, driven, and unstable; a genius programmer, but with incidents of hacking in his past. Kevin Nankets had an otherwise good record with the FBI, and is survived by a son (James, 6), though his wife died last year during a random mugging. Sean Davies has an otherwise perfect record; though in a relationship with Hubert Keith, he didn't let it interfere with his work, and seems to have been a stabilizing influence on the young man.

Magnox Computers is a major freelance computer outfit, which is contracted for work by other firms. They have a dozen or so expert programmers on staff, and the whole place has extremely high security, with at least three guards on duty every night. Their stock fell with the murder/suicide, so they're trying to keep a low profile and hush matters up at the moment. They're our client in this case, so comply with their wishes and do your best to keep things quiet and under control.

MISSIONPARAMETERS

If (as seems likely) we have an infestation, then either capture the ghosts and bring them in, or eliminate them. The previous events may work to your advantage; you should be able to get away with some collateral damage, since the ghosts here already have a reputation. The offices are closed on Sunday (the manager, Mrs. Jefferson, is solid Episcopalian), so that might be your best bet.

INTEL

As indicated, the danger rating here looks high. We probably have one Banshee, one Poltergeist and one Haunter. We don't know whether they're cooperating or fighting; if the latter, it might be possible to turn them against each other. The building's still in use, but rumors of ghosts are spreading and curtailing employee overtime.

Threat Tag: Enigma-class Green

MISSION#NON-APPLICABLE

MISSION TYPE: FUMIGATION

Silence a reporter.

Target Name: Emilio San Miguel

BACKGROUND

Emilio San Miguel (age 30) is a reporter for a local TV-news station. He is an investigative reporter, and he rarely travels with a camera crew until he's ready to "break a story."



In the past, he has helped the community, as when he unveiled a prostitution ring operating within a block of an area high school and aided the police in capturing serial killer Norman Randall. Unfortunately, he also commits his share of costly mistakes — you may recall he whipped the city's Hispanic community into a frenzy over the arrest and subsequent conviction of Jesús Ortillo last year, resulting in a riot that severely injured four civilians and three policemen (this despite the fact that Ortillo was clearly guilty).

Mr. San Miguel is vocal in his disdain of the government (which he feels oppresses minorities deliberately) and is also an outspoken atheist. Despite this latter opinion, the Hispanic community idolizes him, and one word from him can result in a march, a protest or even a firebombing, depending on the nature of that word. He has never been implicated in using his influence directly, but has been questioned in conjunction with several ongoing investigations (and of course, the police receive unfavorable coverage whenever he is questioned). He occasionally stumbles onto Orpheus and T&S Black Ops missions, but has yet to recognize these operations as anything unusual (though several agents were misidentified as "government spooks" in a story he ran recently).

His past history aside, Mr. San Miguel recently went "undercover" in the city's slums and obtained photographs that our clients would like returned. Mr. San Miguel has not aired the story nor done anything with the photographs yet, and our intel indicates he hasn't deviated appreciably from his usual schedule since taking them (which could mean he doesn't know he's being shadowed). Our clients, however, request we silence Mr. San Miguel for good. They assure us that once we fumigate him, they will cover the investigation and ensure that any and all copies of the photographs are found and destroyed; tracking down these photos is *not* a mission priority.

Mr. San Miguel is not married, but lives with his girlfriend (Josephina Marquez, 25) and her son by a previous marriage (Juan Marquez, 4). Do not harm either unless absolutely necessary.

MISSIONPARAMETERS

Silence Emilio San Miguel, permanently. Make sure he does not linger as a ghost. If he does, destroy his spirit. Our clients are well aware that someone as tenacious as Mr. San Miguel might linger to see "justice" done, and are paying to cover that potential loose thread as well.

Making Mr. San Miguel's death look like an accident is not required since our clients can cover up the details and assume jurisdiction over the ensuing investigation. Remember that Mr. San Miguel is paranoid and careful, however, so it is likely he has a bodyguard with him. Make sure nobody sees you following him, and that the police cannot link you to the time or place of his death (Orpheus will aid in providing an alibi if necessary).

INTEL

Mr. San Miguel works long hours, usually beginning at 8:00 AM, when he typically arrives at the news station. He works in his office (no windows, only one door leading to a hallway) until the early afternoon. He sometimes takes lunch with co-workers, conducts interviews over lunch or skips lunch altogether. His afternoons are unpredictable, since he usually spends them tracking down leads and working in the field. Many times, he works into the late evening and does not return home until the early morning. He followed the above schedule three days out of five over a twelve-week period, on average, but never the same three days. His schedule is erratic, and you should probably conduct some cursory intel yourself before striking. Remember, too, that Mr. San Miguel lives with his girlfriend and her young son; these two are not targets (unless she knows about the photos; you may receive an addendum to this mission if that is the case).

Threat Tag: Nemesis Gray

Mr. San Miguel has no special or paranormal skills, but is well-connected, has a bodyguard (Torrance Marcelo, age 27). Both carry pistols. Mr. San Miguel is wary, but often overly curious, which should prove a useful trait for your purposes.

MISSION#0775

MISSION TYPE: BODYGUARD/SALVATION

Protect target from unwanted ghostly advances. Target Name: Kurt Fleet

BACKGROUND

Last year, Minnix Pictures released the film *Ghost Lover*. In brief, the plot involves a young man, played by teenage heartthrob Kurt Fleet, who falls in love with a beautiful female ghost. His love for her is so strong that she returns to life. The film received average reviews, yet did incredibly well at the box office, especially with the coveted repeat-viewing young teen girl demographic.

Those of you here at Orpheus who said this movie was a stunningly bad idea were right. Mr. Fleet, already a target of teen obsession and devotion, drew even more attention with this tug-at-the-heartstrings role. Unfortunately for him, his fans' devotion does not always dissipate when they die. Mr. Fleet has been serially haunted in the months following the film's premiere. Whether his fans died in accidents or by



suicide, whether their bedrooms were Hollywood shrines or they first saw the movie the day before they were killed, the combination of Mr. Fleet's good looks and movie-screen charm with a storyline that promises resurrection through love for a beautiful girl has brought single-minded ghosts from all over the country (and possibly the world) to Mr. Fleet's door. Because he must love them for this fairy tale to work, the ghosts are not content simply to bask in his presence or mope about quietly. They attempt to interact with him, demand his attention, and become violent if they notice each other or grow too frustrated with their current state. Mr. Fleet has been injured several times. He moves from hotel to hotel, never spending the night in the same place twice in a row, or more than two weeks in any city, in an attempt to stay ahead of the ghosts. Despite the relative success of these tactics, both the studio and Mr. Fleet submitted separate requests for an Orpheus team.

MISSIONPARAMETERS

Depart immediately after briefing (contact Mr. Fleet's staff for his itinerary). Deflect all incoming ghosts from Mr. Fleet's presence. Where time and circumstances permit, assist and rescue the approaching ghosts. If there is any danger of an altercation spilling into Mr. Fleet's presence, alert his staff immediately so they can move him to a safe area. This is a limited-time assignment. Mr. Fleet and Minnix Pictures plan to remedy the ghost problem by significantly altering Mr. Fleet's image; a gritty war picture is currently being rushed through editing, using footage that was initially canned when the studio acquired the *Ghost Lover* project.

INTEL

There are rumors Mr. Fleet preferred a contract with NextWorld, with whom he has personal contacts. If the mission team does not arrive promptly and perform to his liking, it is entirely possible Mr. Fleet will pressure the studio to reassign the contract, or employ a NextWorld team of his own initia-

tive. It is in Orpheus' best interest that public sparring over the issue does not occur.

Threat Tag: Enigma-class Green (Ghosts); Nemesis Gray (NextWorld)

It is impossible to predict the numbers and disposition of the ghosts the team may encounter in the duration of this mission. Treat NextWorld employees as per standard Nemesis protocols; don't shoot first, but don't wait to be shot either.

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MISSION TYPE: INTELLIGENCE GATHERING/RETRIEVAL

Find and retrieve lost "meteorite" artifact. Interview area residents and local ghosts looking for visible, audible or psychic effects of the ghost-quake and subsequent particle shower. Locate any punch-through areas, and retrieve any surviving objects.

Location: Park neighborhoods

BACKGROUND

Agent Zoë Vitt was involved in a standard rescue operation (see attached file Mission #0721) when she witnessed an unexplained phenomenon. Agent Vitt was projecting when she experienced a series of violent tremors, followed by the impact of an object that fell from the sky, at the corner of Fairfield and 73rd streets. Agent Vitt retrieved the object, a small white rock approximately 2.5 by 1 by .5 inches. The object was physically present *only* in her projected form and her extended senses, while remaining imperceptible to the living. While the impact object was in her projected possession, the agent encountered two Shadow-class assailants in the vicinity of Holy Cross Hospital, and was forced to make a ripcord retreat to Orpheus. The "meteorite" object was lost during Agent Vitt's rapid return to HQ. There are no official reports from local authorities of any ground tremors or unidentified object sightings in the affected neighborhoods.

MISSIONPARAMETERS

Examine thoroughly the impact site at Fairfield and 73rd. Interview residents (both living and ghost), asking about any visible or audible effects of the tremors or impact, and

additionally about any psychic effects or sequelae following the event. From interview results, establish the total area affected by the tremors, locate any other meteorite impacts and retrieve any surviving objects. Any persistent physical effects must be extensively documented (including optical, digital and IR photography). Any affected physical objects that can be brought back to the labs should be acquired using standard reimbursement procedures. Any witnesses, especially those suffering sequelae, should be encouraged to accept a medical examination at HQ (overnight stay expected; call to arrange immediate transportation). Retrieve the original meteorite object from the Fairfield and 73rd impact if possible, which is expected to be somewhere between Holy Cross Hospital and Orpheus Offices. In a worst-case scenario, the meteorite may be in the possession of the hostiles reported by Agent Vitt. Do not attempt to track down the hostiles unless you've exhausted all other options for locating the object and found no other meteorites of the same nature.

INTEL

This is not the first report of such a phenomenon, but it is the first time the event was witnessed in its entirety by an Orpheus agent (ghost-quakes alone have been reported by agents, but without the meteorite sightings [see attached files: Mission#0478,#0559,#0612]). It is also the closest an observed event of this nature has come to Orpheus. It is theoretically possible that these ghost-quakes are natural events which have gone unreported due to a lack of qualified observers. It is also theoretically possible that these phenomena are new and related to other events currently under investigation. This is the very first phase of the intelligence gathering operation. Do not needlessly narrow the investigation; keep in mind, however, that the reliability of the witnesses decreases as time passes, that surviving impact objects might be further damaged and that hostile ghosts may be attracted to the investigation.

Threat Tag: Possible Shadow-class Ghost interference in the investigation.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Agent Vitt was grievously injured during the skirmish. She is convalescing from her encounter at HQ, where she has been placed under heavy sedation and is therefore unavailable to answer casual inquiries. Her doctor will judge if a request for information from Agent Vitt is important enough to revive her.

GHOST-QUAKES

The living and the dead share the world, kept apart only by blinkered perceptions and the shortcomings of the senses — both of which Orpheus agents and very few others have learned to overcome. There is more to the cosmos than what either the living or the dead can perceive, however. Any agent who has rescued a ghost and watched it ascend into light — or descend into darkness — knows that there are other places or states of being, if not where, or what.

Ghost-quakes are another bit of evidence that something exists beyond the world. A ghost-quake's violent tremors wrack only the spirit, sending ghosts fleeing in terror before the psychic assault. The few Orpheus agents to fully experience a ghost-quake (while projecting, not safely ensconced in their physical bodies) report that the concussive forces are certainly capable of damaging or even destroying a ghost; even during the most violent recorded incident (one that left an Orpheus agent incapacitated), the tremors went unnoticed by the living save for triggering a few car alarms, and caused no verifiable physical damage. Still, Orpheus researchers see reason for concern: Just as a ghost or projected entity can manifest and wreak havoc, so might a ghost-quake, and the damage would be vast and untraceable. In the current geopolitical climate, the idea of a belligerent nuclear response to a manifesting ghost-quake is far too likely for comfort.

As strange as ghost-quakes are, there is an accompanying phenomenon that is even more curious: On occasion, bits of matter are introduced into the world during or immediately after the tremors. These bits, most commonly chunks of rock or metal, do not simply appear; they arrive with a great deal of momentum, as though forcibly ejected from some place, or overcoming some force or obstacle to win through to our world. Even more puzzling, these otherwise completely normal, physical pieces of matter are completely intangible to the living. Projectors, trained to sense spiritual presences, can see these objects, but can't interact with them without projecting. Again, there has been no physical damage recorded from such an event, but the possibility of a ghost meteorite of any real mass suddenly manifesting and impacting without any warning, and with no telescopes or astronomers to place the blame, is at least unnerving.

That's what the world knows. But you, as the Storyteller, want to know more: What causes a ghost-quake? Where do these meteorite things come from? How do they get here, and what would it take for one to leave a real mark on downtown? Here's a little something to get you started.

The origins of both ghost-quakes and ghost meteorites lie beyond the Shroud, in a realm inaccessible to ghosts and projectors. Beyond the Stormwall, the winds of a great storm called the Maelstrom still spin with a fury an earth-bound tempest could never achieve. Chunks of debris, the flotsam and jetsam of some lost civilization, whip through the storm until some small deviation in course sends them crashing into

the dense buffer of the Shroud. Weak materials are simply destroyed. Stronger stuff sends shudders through the Shroud, which ripple through the world as ghost-quakes. In the worst collisions, some chunks of stone or metal have enough momentum to punch through the Shroud, or a second or third object hits the strained Stormwall and wins through — but not enough to become physically present. They fall just short of the final barrier, that lurching step that projectors and ghosts traverse at will.

In less modern times, meteorites were often seen as omens, of bad things to come. These ghost meteorites, already bearing a history of destruction, may also be bearers of bad tidings. Whether drawn to the destruction like moths to a flame, or in some arcane way the cause of it, Spectres, full of Spite and wearing their Stains like favored tools, are often found at the site of a recent ghost-quake — or spotted shortly before one occurs. They are even more likely to appear if there has been (or will be) a ghost meteorite punch-through.

There are other malignant, but subtle forces at work in places where ghost meteorites have recently come through. Spite mounts quietly, but steadily until the holes in the Shroud heal, a process that may take hours or days. Until that time, any rolls made when tapping Spite points suffer a one to difficulty — it is far easier to accumulate Spite here, where it bleeds through the Shroud and pools on the face of the world. This phenomenon makes encounters with malicious ghosts just that much more dangerous, since they will almost certainly be gorged on Spite and spoiling for a fight.

Finally, for a ghost-quake or meteorite to manifest physically would require a weakening of the Shroud, which is otherwise up to the task of containing the effects of the Maelstrom. The uncomfortable possibility exists that a sufficient display of Spite on either side of the Stormwall might weaken it enough for a ghost-quake and punch-through to occur. Certainly any such attempt would require uncanny precision, abundant foreknowledge and unbounded anger.

Projectors or ghosts caught in a ghost-quake suffer increased difficulties for all actions, ranging from one to four depending on the severity of the quake and their distance from its "epicenter." The difficulties are decreased by one for actions which take advantage of the projector or ghost's Stains; for example, using tentacles to hold on to something, or claws to continue fighting during the tremors. It is important to note that ghost meteorites do not always fall down from above — it's just the most common effect, since gravity assures that anything in the air will come down eventually. The Shroud isn't up, or over there, it's everywhere. A breakthrough can occur anywhere, sending rock and metal shooting up from the ground like an ice-cold volcano, or suddenly appearing, without support, in mid-air. Thankfully, the odds of actually getting hit by a ghost meteorite are as minute as those of being hit by a rock from space.

GHOST-QUAKES

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> There are other malignant, but subtle forces at work in places where ghost meteorites have recently come through. Spite mounts quietly, but steadily until the holes in the Shroud heal, a process that may take hours or days. Until that time, any rolls made when tapping Spite points suffer a one to difficulty — it is far easier to accumulate Spite here, where it bleeds through the Shroud and pools on the face of the world. This phenomenon makes encounters with malicious ghosts just that much more dangerous, since they will almost certainly be gorged on Spite and spoiling for a fight.

> Finally, for a ghost-quake or meteorite to manifest physically would require a weakening of the Shroud, which is otherwise up to the task of containing the effects of the Maelstrom. The uncomfortable possibility exists that a sufficient display of Spite on either side of the Stormwall might weaken it enough for a ghost-quake and punch-through to occur. Certainly any such attempt would require uncanny precision, abundant foreknowledge and unbounded anger.

> Projectors or ghosts caught in a ghost-quake suffer increased difficulties for all actions, ranging from one to four depending on the severity of the quake and their distance from its "epicenter." The difficulties are decreased by one for actions which take advantage of the projector or ghost's Stains; for example, using tentacles to hold on to something, or claws to continue fighting during the tremors. It is important to note that ghost meteorites do not always fall down from above — it's just the most common effect, since gravity assures that anything in the air will come down eventually. The Shroud isn't up, or over there, it's everywhere. A breakthrough can occur anywhere, sending rock and metal shooting up from the ground like an ice-cold volcano, or suddenly appearing, without support, in mid-air. Thankfully, the odds of actually getting hit by a ghost meteorite are as minute as those of being hit by a rock from space.



Nature: Name: Lament: Demeanor: Player: Role: Chronicle: Shade: ATTRIBUTES Physical Social Mental Strength______ • O O O O Charisma_____ • O O O O Perception____ •0000 Dexterity______ • 0 0 0 0 Manipulation_____ • 0 0 0 0 Intelligence_____ • 0 0 0 0 Stamina______ • 0 0 0 0 Appearance____ • 0 0 0 0 Wits_____ • 0 0 0 0 ABILITIES Talents Skills Knowledges Academics______00000 Animal Ken_____00000 Alertness_____00000 Crafts______O O O O O Athletics_____00000 Bureaucracy_____OOOOO Awareness____OOOOO $Computer \underline{\hspace{1cm}} O O O O O$ Drive_____00000 Enigmas______O O O O O Brawl_____OOOOO Empathy_____OOOOO Firearms_____OOOOO Finance______O O O O O Expression______OOOOO
Intimidation_____OOOOO Investigation_____OOOOO Meditation______00000 Melee_____00000 Law______00000 Linguistics_____OOOOO Intrigue_____OOOOO Performance____OOOOO Intuition_____00000 Security______00000 Medicine______OOOOO Leadership_____OOOOO Stealth______00000 Occult_____00000 Streetwise_____00000 Survival_____00000 Politics______00000 Subterfuge____OOOOO Technology_____OOOOO Science_____00000 ADVANTAGES Stains Horrors Backgrounds ____00000 _____ 00000 00000 ____00000 ______00000 00000 _____00000 ______00000 00000 _____00000 ______00000 00000 _____00000 ______00000 00000 Default Abilities Health Vitality Dead-Eyes (Chapter Two, p. 82) Bruised 0000000000 Detect Nature Group (Chapter Three, p. 148) -1 🗆 Hurt Incorporeal & Invisible (Chapter Two, p. 82 -1 🗆 Injured Manifest (Chapter Two, p. 82) Willpower -2 Wounded MiseryLovesCompany(ChapterThree,p. 149) -2 Mauled 0000000000 Sense Lifeline (Chapter Three, p. 150) -5 Crippled Sever the Strand (Chapter Three, p. 150) Incapacitated Thievery (Chapter Three, p. 151) Spite Experience 0000000000

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What if death wasn't the end? What if you could die and return to your body, to live again? What if you could remain among the living long after your body crumbled to dust? What if science had rendered death a mere inconvenience?

The door between this world and the next has been thrown open. The souls of the deceased haven't passed, they're among us, and now the living walk among the dead. Mankind has learned to look into the void of the afterlife... but does it stare back?

If death is no longer an absolute, what is?

Some laws should never be broken.

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Dead Wrong

Despite our best efforts, some oversights and errors have crept into the first few **Orpheus** books. We're here to do our best to fix 'em, though.

In the **Orpheus** rulebook, under "Pigment" on p. 286, the lead scientist involved in pigment research and growth is wrongly identified as Dr. Harold Vermeer. That should actually be Dr. Amours Katilian, as stated in **Crusade of Ashes** and this book.

Also, Wail (p. 101) should include the following text (the material in italic is missing from the rulebook):

If a character spends **two** or **more Vitality points**, then she may use this Horror to physically wound one or more people directly in front of her, and within ten yards of her. If attacking a group of people, she may not distinguish among them; everyone in the group risks taking damage since they are all within range of her scream of fury. Victims may roll Stamina to soak damage, the difficulty of which is (number of Vitality expended by attacker + 3). Failing this, a target suffers lethal damage equal to the number of successes scored by the wailing character.